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and the
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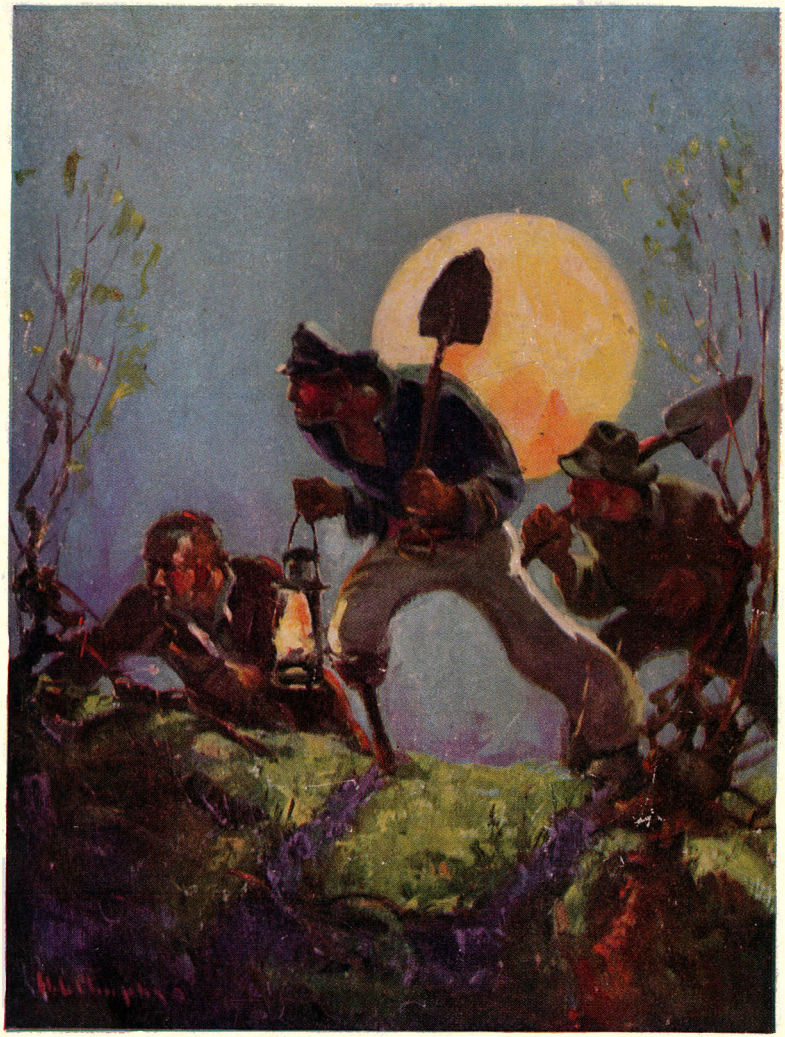

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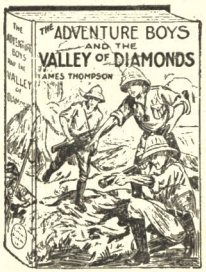

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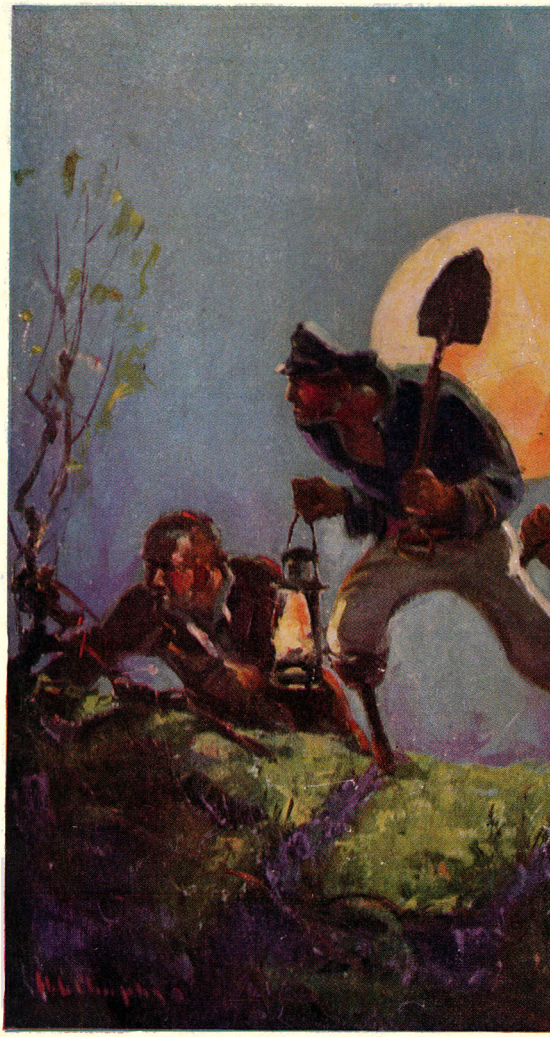

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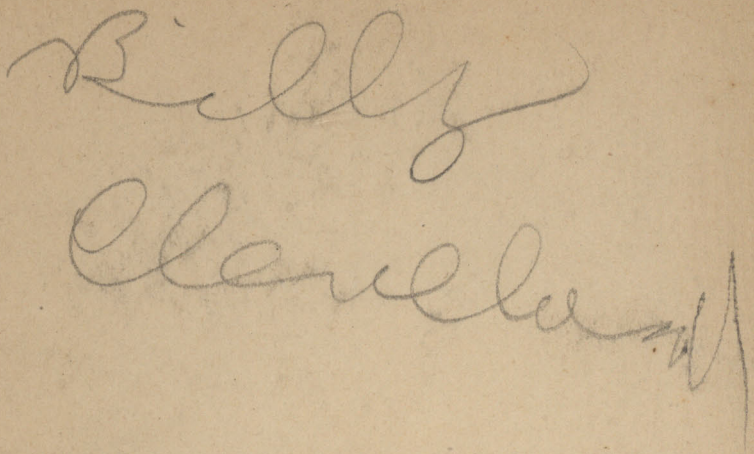

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WE FINALLY GOT TO THE ISLAND WITH THE MAPS AND PAPERS.

Bob Dexter, Storm Mountain Mystery *Page* 81

BOB DEXTER AND THE STORM MOUNTAIN MYSTERY

OR

The Secret of the Log Cabin

By

WILLARD F. BAKER

Author of "Bob Dexter and the Club House Mystery," "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery," "The Boy Ranchers," "The Boy Ranchers on the Trail," etc.

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BOB DEXTER AND THE STORM MOUNTAIN MYSTERY
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BOB DEXTER AND THE STORM MOUNTAIN MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH THE BOX

"COME on, Bob, going to the ball game!"

"It's going to be a corker! Better hurry if you want a good seat!"

Two young men paused at the front gate of a neat cottage, standing somewhat back from a quiet side street of the village, and looked toward another youth who was seated on the porch. This lad glanced up from a book he was reading as his two chums, Harry Pierce and Ned Fuller, hailed him.

"Come on, Bob!" urged Harry, opening the gate. "What's the idea? You're usually the first one in the grand stand when our club plays the Midvale nine."

"Looks as if you didn't want to root for the home team," went on Ned as he followed his companion up the front walk.

"Oh, I'd like to root for them all right, and I'd like to see them win, of course," answered Bob Dexter, as he closed the book he had been reading. But

his chums noticed that he kept one finger in between the pages so he would not lose his place.

"Well, then, you'd better get a move on!" urged Harry. "They won't keep club members' seats for them much longer, and there'll be a big mob there —this is the deciding game of the series."

"Yes, I know," said Bob, "but I'm not going!"

"Not going!" cried the other two, and there was much surprise in their voices.

"What's wrong?" demanded Harry. "You aren't soured on the club, are you?"

"Of course I'm not," and Bob smiled. "I should have said I can't go. I've got something to do."

"What do you mean—finish that book—a detective story, I'll stake a cookie on it!" exclaimed Ned. "I thought so!" he added, as he turned the book over in Bob's hand and disclosed the title which was "The Strange Case of the Twisted Ear."

"Say, look here!" broke in Harry, as he playfully snatched the book from Bob. "If you're going to stay here and read one of your everlasting detective stories, when the most important club ball game of the season is being played—well, all I've got to say is that Ned and I won't let you!"

"Atta boy! You let out an earful that time!" cried Ned.

The two chums caught hold of Bob and pulled him from the chair. Laughingly he protested and

made fast to one of the porch pillars to avoid being yanked off.

"Cut it out, fellows! Cut it out!" begged Bob. "It isn't that at all! I'm not staying here to read a detective story, though I was glancing over this French one while I was waiting. But I've got to do something for my uncle, and that's why I'm staying here. I want to go to the ball game as badly as you fellows do. And I'm coming as soon as a certain man appears with some important papers for Uncle Joel. But I can't go until then—really, I can't. Uncle Joel told me to stay here, waiting for this man. It's very important."

There was that in Bob's voice which impressed his chums. They released their holds on him, rather reluctantly be it said, and Bob picked up the book that had fallen to the porch floor, and resumed his seat in the chair, albeit somewhat ruffled by the dragging process.

"Well, that's different, of course," admitted Ned as he straightened his collar which had been shifted in the struggle.

"Why didn't you say at first that you were staying here because your uncle asked you to?" inquired Harry. He and Ned knew the stern qualities of Bob's Uncle Joel. Though a just man, Mr. Dexter, who was brother to Bob's dead father, insisted on strict obedience from his nephew, especially in matters of business.

"This is a business matter," said Bob. "I would have told you fellows, if you'd given me a chance. But you went off, half cocked, and I couldn't make myself heard."

"Oh, all right. Maybe we were a bit hasty," conceded Ned.

"But when we saw you sitting here, doing nothing but reading a detective story, we concluded you didn't have anything else to do, and that you could just as well as not come to the ball game with us," added Harry.

"I'd come in a minute if Uncle Joel hadn't wished this job on me!" declared Bob. "But you know how it is—I'm not exactly my own boss."

"Yes, we know," admitted Harry.

Bob Dexter was an orphan, dependent on his uncle, and while Mr. Dexter was just and kind, still he had rights that must be respected, and Bob realized this.

"Uncle Joel is pretty good to me," went on Bob. "And I've got to pay him back as much as I can. Look how he let me have a lot of time to myself going to Beacon Beach this summer."

"And a mighty good thing you did go to Beacon Beach!" exclaimed Ned. "If you hadn't the mystery there never would have been solved."

"Oh, I guess some one else would have stumbled on it," said Bob, modestly.

"I'm not so sure of that," chimed in Harry.

"Anyhow, we won't bother you any more. Go on—finish the job, whatever it is."

"Couldn't you come to the ball game and do it afterward—whatever your uncle wants you to do?" asked Ned.

Bob shook his head.

"It can't be done," he replied. "If I can get over to the park later I'll be there. I hope I can see the last half of the game, anyhow. But it's like this. Mr. Sheldon, a man with whom my uncle does a lot of business of one kind or another, is sending some important papers on to-day to be signed. If they aren't signed to-day it means the loss of a lot of money. Mr. Sheldon is passing through Cliffside on the train that gets here at 2:30. He hasn't time to get off, as he has to go on to a conference with his lawyer. But he's going to hand me the papers at the depot, when the train stops, and I've got to rush them up to my uncle's office. That's why I can't go to the ball game."

"Why doesn't your uncle himself meet this Mr. Sheldon at the train and sign the papers?" asked Ned. "Oh why can't some one else meet this man who's in such a hurry?"

"I don't know why it can't be done that way, but it can't, or my uncle wouldn't ask me to do it," said Bob, simply. "I suppose he has good reasons for not going to the train himself. And he doesn't want to trust an ordinary messenger to get the papers.

So I'll have to do it. Then, after I get through, if there's time enough, I'll come to the game."

"All right," assented Harry, satisfied with this explanation. "We'll try and save a seat for you—you know where we usually sit."

"Yes, I know," said Bob, as he laid his book just inside the front door.

"And if you're going to meet that 2:30 train it's time you got a move on," added Ned.

"Yes, I'm going to start now," said Bob. "Have to make a time allowance for the little old flivver," he added with a laugh. "If you fellows like I'll drop you off at the ball park."

"Drop us off is good!" laughed Ned.

"If the old flivver doesn't drop apart itself on the way down," added Harry.

"Oh, I guess she'll hold together that long," chuckled the young detective—for Bob was just that, as some of you know, and as others of you will learn in the course of this story. Bob walked around to the side drive where stood an ancient and honorable automobile of the class generally called flivvers. Truly it was ancient, and Bob had added the title honorable, for it had given him good service in spite of the small price he paid for it.

"Can you get her going?" asked Ned, as he and his chum looked somewhat dubiously at the machine.

"Well, I don't want to make any rash statements," chuckled Bob, "but I think if I give her a good dose

of talcum powder, and rub a lip stick on the carburetor she may be induced to give us service. Hop in and I'll have a go at her."

"Better wait until he gets her started before you hop in," cautioned Ned to Harry. "She may buck with you."

"Oh, she isn't as temperamental as all that," laughed Bob. He climbed to the seat, turned on the ignition and pressed the self-starter pedal. There was a sort of groaning hum.

"I thought so! Come on, Ned, we'll walk!" laughed Harry.

But a moment later the engine began to turn over with a steady throb, hum and roar that told of plenty of power, each of the four cylinders firing evenly and regularly.

"Not so bad!" announced Ned, listening with a critical ear.

"Yes, I've got her pretty well tuned up," admitted Bob with pardonable pride. "I guess she'll take me there and back."

"Well, we'll take a chance," said Harry, and soon the three chums were rattling down the road. Rattling is the proper word, for though the flivver certainly moved, she also rattled, as do most of her kind. But rattling is no crime.

"Say, there's going to be a big crowd," observed Bob as he slowed up at the ball park to let his chums jump off. "Wish I could see the game!"

"Same here," remarked Harry. "Yes, there's going to be a mob all right!"

Though it would be nearly an hour before the game started, already throngs were congregating at the park. For the contest was an important one.

There had long been a rivalry between the Boys' Athletic Club, to which Bob, Ned and Harry belonged, and the team from Midvale, a town about ten miles from Cliffside where Bob Dexter lived. Each year a series of games took place, and up to date the championship had wavered between the two.

This year the rivalry was keener than before, and should the Boys' Club clinch this contest it meant winning the penant for the season. Hence the interest.

"Root hard, fellows!" begged Bob as he started his machine off again, while his chums hastened to get the seats reserved for club members. "I'll get back in time for the last inning if I can!"

"Atta boy!" called Ned.

It was with rather a disappointed air that Bob continued on to the railroad station. But, after all, he knew he must do his duty, and helping his uncle, who was bringing him up, was part of this.

The 2:30 train pulled in a little late, and Bob, who had been told what Mr. Sheldon looked like, so he would know him, caught sight of this individual out on the platform of one of the cars, while the

train was yet moving. Mr. Dexter had arranged for the transfer of the papers, and to make sure that Mr. Sheldon would know Bob, the latter carried in his hand a red dahlia from his aunt's garden.

"You're Bob Dexter, aren't you?" cried Mr. Sheldon as he held a bundle of legal-looking documents to the lad. "Yes, I see you have the red flower. It's all right, tell your uncle, but the papers must be signed before two witnesses before three o'clock. I'll look after the other matters for him. Glad the train wasn't any later and I'm glad you are here on time. I was getting a bit worried. If things had gone wrong it would mean a big loss. Don't lose any time getting those papers back to your uncle now. Good-by!"

"Good-by," was all Bob had time to say, and then the train pulled out again, for it seldon stopped long at Cliffside. Mr. Sheldon went back to his seat in his car, waving his hand to Bob. The latter looked at the bundle of papers, though they told him nothing of the business they represented. However, Bob did not think much about that. His affair was to get the documents to his uncle as soon as he could. And it was now twenty minutes to three by the depot clock.

"Hope the old flivver doesn't go back on me!" mused Bob as he climbed to his seat. He was glad to find that the motor turned over at the first touch on the self-starter pedal, and he was about to let in

the clutch and dart away when he was hailed by a voice calling:

"I say there young feller, can you give me a lift?"

He turned to see, beckoning to him, an old man—a grizzled old man with a short, stubby beard. Under his arm the man, whose clothing was not of the best nor most up to date, carried a small brass-bound box—a box such as might contain papers or other things of value. And yet the appearance of the man did not indicate that he was in the habit of carrying things of value.

He was, to put it bluntly, but a few degrees removed in appearance from a tramp, though Bob noticed his face and hands were clean, which is not often the case with tramps.

"I'm in a hurry," said Bob, as civilly as he could under the circumstances.

"So am I," said the man with the box. "I've got to get to Storm Mountain as quick as I can."

Storm Mountain was a town well up amid the hills, about five miles from Cliffside. It was located on the side of a big hill also called Storm Mountain.

"Sorry, but I'm not going up Storm Mountain way," said Bob, as he slowly allowed the flivver to get up speed.

"But I'm willing to pay you!" said the man, shifting his brass-bound box under his other arm as he limped forward—Bob noticed that he walked with a slight limp.

"I'm not a taxicab—you can hire one in town or over there," and Bob pointed to where usually some ancient autos stood—representing the jitney and taxi service of Cliffside. Just now there were no vehicles there, as they seldom met the 2:30 train.

"I'd hire one if I could," said the man with the box. "But I can't. I'll pay you well to take me to Storm Mountain."

"I'm sorry, but I have an important engagement in town," said Bob, as he let his car gather speed. "You'll have to get some one else."

"All right," said the man good-naturedly enough. He turned back to the station, and as he drove off Bob was rather glad that he could conscientiously refuse the service.

"For, to tell the truth," said Bob to himself, "I don't altogether like your looks, nor the looks of that box you carry. You may be all right, but I've got important papers and I've got to look after them."

He made good time to his uncle's office, and found Mr. Dexter rather anxiously waiting for him.

"Oh, you have them, I see!" exclaimed Mr. Dexter as he took the bundle of papers from his nephew. "Mr. Sheldon was there all right, I take it?"

"Yes, and he said he'd attend to the other matters. But these must be signed before two witnesses by three o'clock."

"I know it, Bob. I'll attend to it right away. You had no other trouble, did you—I mean no one

stopped you to ask to look at the papers—or anything like that?" Mr. Dexter seemed anxious and nervous.

"No, I wasn't exactly stopped," Bob answered. "But there was an old man with a box who wanted me to take him to Storm Mountain."

"What sort of a man, Bob?" eagerly asked his uncle.

Bob described the individual, and a look of relief came over Mr. Dexter's face.

"It isn't any one I know," he said. "I guess it's all right, Bob. You may go now. Thanks for attending to this for me. I can look after matters now."

"Then I'll go to the ball game," announced Bob.

He was on his way to the park, taking a short cut along a back road when, in a lonely spot he saw a huddled figure lying beside the road.

"It's a man!" exclaimed Bob, as he stopped his machine and jumped out. "The man with the box —looks as if he'd been killed!"

CHAPTER II

THE LOG CABIN

BOB DEXTER, young as he was, had been through too many strenuous experiences to be turned aside at the thought of a dead man. Besides, this was right in the line of Bob's ambition, if you get my meaning. That is, he had fully determined to become a detective, and here seemed right at hand a mystery that needed solving. He was first on the scene—a most advantageous thing from a detective's standpoint.

"I've got to keep my wits about me," thought the lad to himself as he approached the prostrate man who lay suspiciously still and quiet in the grass beside the lonely road.

And while Bob is getting ready to solve what he hopes may be a most baffling mystery, perhaps it would be just as well if I told my new readers a little about the youth who is to figure as the hero of this story.

Bob Dexter's father and mother died when he was quite young, and his uncle Joel Dexter agreed to care for the lad and bring him up as his own son. Uncle Joel and his wife Aunt Hannah had faithfully kept their promise, and Bob could not have

asked for a better home nor for more loving care than he received.

But though loving and kind, Mr. Dexter insisted on Bob "toeing the mark," as he called it in the matter of work and duties, including attending school. Bob's uncle was "well fixed" as regards this world's goods, though not exactly a man of wealth. He was interested in several businesses in Cliffside, including a hardware store he owned. He also loaned money on mortgages and kept a private office over the First National Bank, in which enterprise he was said to own several shares.

Thus Bob grew from boyhood to young manhood, and when he began to develop a taste for detective stories, and, not only that but a desire to solve local crimes and mysteries, Uncle Joel rather "put his foot down," as he expressed it.

However, when Bob scored a point on the Cliffside police, by finding Jennie Thorp, who, it was supposed, had been kidnaped (though she wasn't) Bob's stock went up several points. And when, as I have told you in the first volume of this series, entitled "Bob Dexter and the Club House Mystery," the youth solved the secret of the Golden Eagle, well, then Uncle Joel "drew in his horns," as his wife said, and Bob "detected" to his heart's content.

The Golden Eagle was the mascot of the Boys' Athletic Club, and when it vanished there was a great

deal of astonishment, which only subsided when Bob got the eagle back.

Following that, in the volume just preceding this one, called "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery," the lad added other laurels.

He and his chums, Ned and Harry, had gone camping at Beacon Beach for their summer vacation. Almost as soon as they arrived they were enveloped in a mystery which did not end until Bob had found out why the beacon in the lighthouse went out so often, and until he had learned what the "yellow boys" were in the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*.

"And now I seem to be up against something else," murmured Bob, as he approached the prostrate man in the grass, and caught sight of the brass-bound box lying near his motionless hand. "Just got back from the Beacon Beach trouble and I run into this. Well, the more the better for me—though I hope this poor old chap isn't dead!"

He wasn't, as Bob soon discovered. The man was breathing, and when the lad had dashed into his face some water from a nearby spring, and had poured between the stranger's lips some from a cup Bob carried in his car for use in filling his storage battery, the man opened his eyes, looked at the youth and cried:

"Did he get it?"

"Did who get what?" Bob wanted to know.

The man's eyes wildly roved the ground about

him, and, lighting on the box he breathed a sigh of relief. He reached out a hand, drew the little chest to him and then, slipping it under his legs as he sat up on the ground he put both hands to the back of his head.

"Um!" he murmured, with a wince of pain. "Quite a lump there. Big as a hen's egg, I guess. Would you mind taking a look, young feller, and seeing how badly I'm cut? Though I guess I'm not cut at all," he went on, as he looked at his fingers and saw no sign of blood.

"No, you aren't cut," said Bob, taking a look as requested. "But what happened to you? Did you fall?"

"Sort of," admitted the man with a half smile. "But I reckon I was tapped on the head first, or else struck with a rock to help in the falling business. Though they didn't dare take it after they knocked me out. Rod Marbury's nerve must have failed him in the pinch. So much the better for me. I told him I'd play fair, but he hasn't. Now he can whistle for his share! He can whistle for a wind that he'll never get!" and the old man, who looked but a few degrees removed from a tramp, started to get up.

"Better wait a minute," advised Bob kindly. "You've been knocked out. If you rest a bit longer, and take some more water you'll feel stronger."

"Oh, I'm all right, young feller!" was the answer, and the man's actions and voice betokened that he

was almost his vigorous self again. "It takes more than a knock on the head with a belaying pin to do for old Hiram Beegle. I'm all right. Rod didn't get the box, and that's what he was after. Did you see anything of him?"

"Of whom?" Bob wanted to know.

"Of Rodney Marbury, the slickest chap I ever dealt with. He's cute, Rod is, but his nerve failed him at the last minute, even after he knocked me out. He must have been hiding in the bushes and heaved a rock out at me as I went by. Then I passed out and he must have been frightened away by hearing you coming along."

"It's possible that he did," admitted Bob. "My old machine rattles enough to be heard a long distance. But I didn't see anybody running away from you."

"You didn't, eh?" asked Hiram Beegle, for that, evidently, was his name. "Well, very likely he run the other way so he wouldn't meet you. But I'm much obliged to you, and now I'll be on my way."

He got to his feet and stowed the box under his left arm. Then he looked about and found a stout cudgel which he grasped in his right hand. He was the vigorous figure of a man now, ready for a fray.

"Excuse me," said Bob, "but didn't I see you down at the station a little while ago?"

"Yes, I was there. I asked some young feller to give me a lift to Storm Mountain, but——"

"You asked me," spoke Bob with a smile. "I'm sorry, but I had an important engagement just then and couldn't spare the time to take you."

"Hum! Yes, you're the same chap," said Mr. Beegle, looking critically at Bob. "I don't blame you a bit. Business first always—that's a good rule. I waited for one of them taxi fellers like you told me to, but they wanted ten dollars to take me to Storm Mountain. I said I wanted to *hire* one of their cars, not *buy* it, and they laughed at me."

"Ten dollars was too much," observed Bob, looking at his watch, and trying to decide if he could make the baseball park in time to see the end of the big game. He wanted to do the Samaritan act, also, in looking after this stranger, for he did not think it either kind or wise to let him go off by himself on the five mile tramp.

"It was about eight dollars too much," said the old man. "I would be willing to pay two, but not ten. Well, I can walk it."

"No," said Bob, coming to a sudden decision, "I'll take you. I have a car and I've got nothing important to do now." He had a somewhat selfish motive in making this offer—he wanted to find out more about Hiram Beegle and about Rod Marbury. He wanted to know what valuables the box contained, and why the attack had been made.

"Well, it's mighty decent of you to want to give me a lift," said Mr. Beegle. "I take it right kind

of you. But if you do take me to my cabin I want to pay you. I'll give you two dollars."

"I don't want your money," laughed Bob.

"Then I won't ride with you!" The old man was very firm about this. "Hiram Beegle can pay his way—there are a few shots left in the locker yet, and if things go right I'll be rich some day," and he shook the brass-bound box. "I'll pay you two dollars or I'll walk!" he concluded with a shake of his grizzled head.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," chuckled the lad. "I'm in neither the taxi nor jitney business, but I'll take your money, though it won't take that much gasolene or oil to put you in Storm Mountain. Where in the town do you live?"

"I don't live in the town, exactly," said the old man. "I live all alone in a log cabin up on the side of the mountain. It's a fairly good road there, or I wouldn't let you take your car up it."

"A flivver can go anywhere!" said Bob.

"Yes, I reckon they can. Well, I'm much obliged to you—both for coming along and scaring away Rod Marbury after he knocked me out, and for giving me a lift."

"I'm not sure I scared away any one," said Bob. "I didn't see any one at all. I was coming along the road and saw you stretched out."

"Yes, I was stretched out, all right," chuckled Mr. Beegle, who seemed to have quite recovered now,

except for the lump on the back of his head. "And I didn't exactly see Rod myself. But I'd be willing to wager a marlin spike to a rope's end that he had a hand in it."

Mr. Beegle headed for Bob's machine, the engine of which was still running, but before starting off with the old man the young detective bethought him that he had better make a few inquiries.

"Look here, Mr. Beegle," said the lad frankly, "I'm very glad to be able to help you and give you a lift, but I must know that this is all straight. I don't want to find out afterward that I've been taking part in a crime."

"A crime, what do you mean?" the old man seemed indignant.

"I mean there's been violence done to you. You carry something you intimate is valuable," and Bob nodded toward the box. "You say some one tried to get it away from you. Now has there been a robbery—is that part of the spoil and is there a fight over the division of it? I have a right to know before I take you to Storm Mountain."

Mr. Beegle seemed greatly surprised and then a smile came over his grizzled face.

"Young man, you're right!" he exclaimed. "You have a right to know certain things. But I'll tell you at once there has been no robbery. I came into possession of this box in a legal way, though some one would be glad to get it away from me. I in-

herited this. Here, I'll prove it to you. Do you know Judge Weston?"

"The lawyer? Of course I do!" exclaimed Bob.

"Then stop at his office on the way to my cabin. Judge Weston will tell you how I came by this box. I'll not say another word until you talk to Judge Weston."

Bob felt a trifle mean at seeming to doubt the old man's word, but he felt he had a right to be assured that everything was all right. So, accordingly, he drove to the office of the lawyer, who had once been a county judge, the title still clinging to him as such titles will.

"Hello, Mr. Beegle, back again!" greeted the lawyer, as Bob and his new friend entered. "Wasn't everything in the box all right?"

"Why, yes, Judge, I think so," was the answer. "I only took a casual look inside, but all the papers seem to be there. But I ran into a little trouble after leaving your office," and he told of the assault on him. "Then this young feller comes along," resumed Hiram Beegle, "and offers to take me home. But he wants to be sure I didn't steal this box," and Mr. Beegle chuckled.

"No, I can testify to that," said Judge Weston with a smile. "You came into possession of it rightfully and legally. I can see Bob's point though, and it is well taken, you being a stranger to him.

"But it's all right, Bob. I handed this box to

Mr. Beegle about two hours ago. He inherited it under the will of Hank Denby, a client of mine who died in Fayetteville about a month ago. I have been settling up the Denby estate—what there was of it—and this box comes to Mr. Beegle. I just turned it over to him."

"And Rod Marbury didn't have a share in it—did he?" asked the old man.

"He was not mentioned in Mr. Denby's will," was the lawyer's answer. "In fact, I know nothing of this Rod Marbury except what you have told me, Mr. Beegle. And you told me in confidence so I cannot reveal that."

"Oh, I don't want to know any more!" broke in Bob. "I just wanted to know, after I heard there was a fight over the possession of this box, that Mr. Beegle had a right to it. Now I'll take him home."

"That's very kind of you, Bob," said the former judge. "You have my word that everything is all right, as far as Mr. Beegle's legal possession of that box is concerned."

"Well, are you satisfied?" asked the old man.

"Perfectly," answered the young detective. And he made up his mind that if there was a further mystery in the matter he would try to solve it later.

"Then let's pull up our mud hook," went on Mr. Beegle. "It's getting late and I'd like soon to be back safe in my log cabin. Much obliged to you, Judge."

"Don't mention it. The case is now closed as far as I am concerned."

As Bob drove his machine out through Cliffside, in the direction of Storm Mountain, he saw some of his friends coming home from the ball game.

"Who won?" he called to Fred Merton.

"We did, eight to six!"

"Wow! Good enough!"

The lad and his old companion were soon on a quiet country road. Mr. Beegle had not talked a great deal, occasionally putting his hand up to his injured head.

"Does it hurt much?" asked Bob. "Had you better stop and see a doctor?"

"No, thanks. I'll be all right. I'm not going to give Marbury another chance at me."

"Do you think he might try to waylay you again?" asked Bob, not a little apprehensive of being in the companionship of a man against whom, it was evident, some one had a grudge.

"Oh, he won't get me now," was the chuckled answer. "I've got the weather gage on him all right. We'll soon be at my place."

Storm Mountain was a small village at the foot of the mountain bearing that name, and Bob soon was driving through it, taking the turns pointed out by Mr. Beegle who sat beside him.

"The next turn to the left is the road that leads to my place," said the old man, pointing ahead. They

were on a quiet stretch of country thoroughfare, steadily ascending the grade. The flivver puffed and wheezed, but kept on going.

"Here we are—my shack!" exclaimed Mr. Beegle a little later, after the turn had been made into a sort of dirt lane. "Now I'm all right."

Bob saw before him a small log cabin, rather neat and trim, with a flower garden in front, or, rather, the remains of one, for it was now October. And in the rear were standing some lima bean poles and shocks of dried corn.

Hiram Beegle leaped out of the flivver and stood still for a moment. He looked fixedly at the log cabin and then in a low voice said to Bob:

"Would you mind waiting here a moment?"

"No. What for?" inquired the lad.

"Well, I just want to make sure nobody's hiding in there to give me another knock on the head. I've been away all day—the place has been shut up. It's just possible——"

"I'll wait until you see if it's all right," said Bob, as the old man began a cautious approach toward his cabin.

CHAPTER III

STARTLING NEWS

SINCE noon that day so many things had happened in Bob Dexter's life that as he watched the old man walk toward the log cabin, the lad was almost prepared for something else of a startling nature.

To begin with there had been that hurried trip to the train to get the important papers from Mr. Sheldon. And then there had been his Uncle Joel's fear lest some one might have tried to get the documents away from Bob.

Followed then his discovery of Hiram Beegle, knocked out at the side of the road, after the young detective's encounter with him at the railroad station, and mixed up with this was the mystery of the brass-bound box, the vindictive Rod Marbury and the lawyer's guarantee as to Hiram's legal right to the little chest.

And now, on top of this, some enemy might burst forth from the lonely log cabin.

But Bob was spared this last act, though as a matter of fact the strong, healthy and excitement-loving young detective would have welcomed something more to bring the day to a fitting close.

However, nothing happened. For after Hiram Beegle had cautiously scouted about the cabin for several minutes he unlocked the door, swung it back and himself jumped to one side, flattening his body out against the side of the cabin.

Bob almost wanted to laugh at this—it was like something in a moving picture melodrama. Doubtless the old man had good reason for his caution, but there was no need of it. No one leaped out at him, there was no shooting and no flashing of a thrown knife.

All was peace and quietness.

"It's just as well to be on the safe side," remarked Mr. Beegle as he stepped away from the side of the cabin and prepared to enter it. "No telling what Rod might be up to. Now, young man, I'll pay you off, say much obliged and give you a drink of buttermilk right cold out of my spring house if you'll take it."

"Thanks," answered Bob. "I'm very fond of buttermilk, but I'd rather not take your money," for the old man passed over two one dollar bills.

"You got to take it—that was the bargain. And if you'll come in and sit down a minute I'll get you the buttermilk. I buy it off Jason Studder, down the road, and keep it cool in the spring. But first I'll just take care of this. I've had trouble enough to get it, and I don't want to lose it again."

Bob followed the old man into the long cabin.

Hiram Beegle carried the box under his arm, and without setting it down he went to a cupboard in the wall and thrust in his hand. There was a sort of clicking sound, as if machinery was operating and Bob started.

Well he might, for close beside him, as he stood near a wall of the log cabin—a wall made of smooth boards—a sort of secret panel dropped, revealing a little recess or hiding place. And in this niche was a large brass key.

"It isn't every one I let see the place I keep the key to my strong room," chuckled the old man. "But I trust you and Judge Weston. Rod Marbury could search a week and never find this, I'm thinking."

"I'm not so sure of that," replied Bob. "I think I could get at it."

"No, you couldn't—not even knowing that there's a catch in this cupboard," challenged Mr. Beegle. "Here, you try it."

He closed the dropped panel, leaving the big brass key in the niche, and then waved his hand toward the cupboard beside the fireplace—an invitation to Bob to try.

The young detective could not see much in the cupboard—it was too small—but he felt about with trained fingers. He found a number of knobs and catches, but pressing and pulling on them one after another, and on several at the same time, produced no effect.

"You couldn't work it in a year unless you knew how," boasted the old man. "Of course you could tear the cabin apart and find the key that way—but it would take time."

Once more, after Bob's failure, Hiram put his hand within the cupboard and an instant later the secret panel dropped. So cleverly was the hidden niche made and so closely did the sliding panel fit into place, that not even with his sharp eyes could Bob see where the joining was in the wall, after the niche had been closed again.

For the old man closed it after taking out the brass key. And with this key in one hand, and the mysterious box in the other, he approached a small inner door.

"This is what I call my strong room," he said to Bob, as he put the ponderous key in the lock. And it was a big key—like one that might be part of the great lock on some prison door. There was a clicking of the wards and tumblers of the lock, and the door was opened. It was of heavy oak, cross planks being spiked to the inner side.

Bob had his first glimpse into a room that, soon, was to play a part in a strange mystery. In fact, this was Bob's first view of the cabin where Hiram Beegle lived, though he knew the cabin was situated on this road, for he had seen it before, some years ago. Then no one lived in it, and the place was

somewhat in ruins. Now it was a most picturesque home for the old man who lived alone in it.

Bob expected to see a sort of vault when the ponderous door swung back, but he was rather surprised to note that the place contained a table, a chair and a bed, in addition to a strong chest, iron-bound and fastened with a heavy black padlock.

"Do you sleep in here, Mr. Beegle?" asked the lad and he accented the word "sleep," so that the old man looked at him in some surprise and remarked:

"Of course I sleep here. Why not?"

"Well, there aren't any windows in the place. How do you get fresh air?"

"Oh, that!" he laughed. "I reckon you can tell that I like fresh air as much as anybody. I'm an outdoor man—always was. Well, I don't make a practice of sleeping here, but when I do I get plenty of fresh air through the fireplace," and he pointed to a hearth in the room. Bob knew that an open fireplace is one of the best methods known of ventilating a room.

And certainly if ever a room needed ventilation this inner one in the lonely log cabin did, for the strong door was the only opening in it. Not a window, not a porthole, nor so much as a crack gave on the outside. It was a veritable vault, the chimney opening being the only one by which a person shut in the room could save himself from smothering.

"Yes, once I'm shut up in here not even Rod Marbury can get at me!" chuckled Hiram Beegle.

"Couldn't he get down the chimney?" asked Bob.

"I'd like to see him try it! There's a crook in the flue and a raccoon that once tried to get down, though why I don't know, was stuck until I tore a hole in the outside and set the poor thing free. That's what would happen to Rod Marbury if he tried it. No, he'd better not try to play Santa Claus with me!" and again the old man chuckled.

While Bob looked about the room, noting how strong the walls were and the thickness of the door, the old man opened the chest in the corner and in it placed the brass-bound box, snapping the padlock shut after he made his deposit.

"There!" he announced, "I guess it's all right now. It's safe! Rod Marbury can whistle for a breeze but that's all the good it will do him. Now for your buttermilk, young man."

"Oh, don't trouble about me!" begged Bob.

"It isn't any trouble. It's only a step to the spring and I'd like a drink myself after what I've been through."

"Aren't you going to notify the police?" asked Bob as he preceded the old man from the strong room, watching him turn the ponderous key in the lock.

"Notify the police? What about?" asked Hiram Beegle.

"About the attack on you—by Rodney Marbury as you think."

"As I know, you mean, young man. But I don't need the police. I can deal with that chap myself if need comes. But I guess he knows he's through. He won't bother me again. Now for the buttermilk."

There was a small spring house not far from the log cabin, and from this cool repository Hiram brought a can of rich, cool buttermilk, which was most refreshing to Bob, for the day was hot, even though it was October.

"Well, much obliged to you, Bob Dexter," said Hiram, as Bob was about to take his leave, having seen the big brass key deposited in the secret niche and the panel closed. "If it's all the same to you, I'd just as soon you wouldn't tell everybody what you've seen and heard to-day."

"I'll keep quiet about it," the lad promised.

He rode off down the mountain trail in his flivver, looking back to see the odd but kindly old man waving a farewell to him. Bob little knew under what circumstances he would see Hiram Beegle again.

It was late afternoon when Bob returned home, for he got a puncture when halfway to Cliffside and had to stop to change a tire. As he drew up in front of his house he met his two chums, Harry and Ned.

"Too bad you missed the game," remarked Ned.

"Yes," assented Bob, "I'm sorry, too."

"What did you do with Rip Van Winkle?" asked Harry.

"Rip Van Winkle?" repeated Bob, wondering.

"Yes. The old codger Fred Merton saw you with."

"Oh, Hiram Beegle," chuckled Bob. "Yes, he is a queer character," and he told as much of the story as would not violate his promise.

"Well, I s'pose you know what you're doing," said Ned. "But from what Fred said about this old codger I wouldn't want to meet him alone after dark, Bob."

"Oh, he's all right," protested the young detective with a laugh. "But I suppose there'll be great doings at the club house to-night."

"There sure will—to celebrate the game to-day. Going to be there?"

"Surest thing you know. I'll see you there. So long!"

"So long, Bob!"

The two chums went on their way and Bob went into the house after putting his car in the barn that had been turned into a garage.

The Boys' Athletic Club had a jollification meeting that night over the baseball victory, and the Golden Eagle mascot looked down most approvingly from his perch to which he had been restored by the efforts of the young detective.

"I don't believe we'd have had half such a good game out of it to-day if it hadn't been for the Golden Eagle," remarked Ned, as he sat with his chums, looking up at the mascot bird.

"You're right!" chimed in Harry.

"Oh, I guess you imagine a lot of that," laughed Bob. "Still, I'm glad the old bird is back in place."

"You said it!" exclaimed his chums.

It was next morning, when Bob was on his way to his uncle's hardware store where he now worked, that the lad met Harry and Ned.

"Did you hear the news?" cried Harry.

"What news?" asked Bob, slowing up his flivver so his chums might leap in.

"Old Hiram Beegle was murdered last night in his cabin!" cried Ned.

CHAPTER IV

WOODEN LEG

SUSPECTING that his chums were playing some joke on him, though he thought this rather a poor subject for humor, and believing that Harry and Ned wanted to get a rise out of him, Bob Dexter did not at once show the astonishment that was expected. Instead he merely smiled and remarked:

"Hop in! If I believe that I s'pose you'll tell me another!"

"Say, this is straight!" cried Ned.

"No kidding!" added Harry. "The old man was killed last night. You know who we mean—Rip Van Winkle—the old codger you took over to Storm Mountain in this very flivver."

"Yes, I know, who you mean all right," assented Bob. "But who told you he was killed? How, why, when, where and all the rest of it?"

"We didn't hear any of the particulars," explained Harry. "But Chief Drayton, of the Storm Mountain police force—guess he's the whole force as a matter of fact—Drayton just came over here to get our chief to help solve the mystery."

"Oh, then there's a mystery about it, is there?" asked Bob, and his chums noticed that he at once

began to pay close attention to what they were saying.

"Sure there's a mystery," asserted Ned. "Wouldn't you call it a mystery if a man was found dead in a locked room—a room without a window in it, and only one door, and that locked on the inside and the man dead inside? Isn't that a mystery, Bob Dexter—just as much of a mystery as who took our Golden Eagle?"

"Or what the 'yellow boys' were in the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*?" added Harry.

"Sure that would be a mystery if everything is as you say it is," asserted Bob. "But in the first place if old Hiram Beegle has been killed and if his body is in that room, with only one door leading into it, how do the authorities know anything about it? Why, you can't even see into that room when the door is shut!"

"How do you know?" asked Ned quickly.

"Because I've been in that room. I was in there yesterday afternoon with Hiram Beegle. There is only one entrance to it and that by the door, for the fireplace doesn't count."

"You were in that room?" cried Harry in surprise.

"Certainly I was."

"Why didn't you tell us?" asked Ned, feeling that his announcement of the murder was as nothing compared with this news.

"Oh, well, there wasn't any need of speaking about it," said Bob.

"Well, I guess you've seen the last of Hiram Beegle," went on Harry. "That is unless you want to go to the scene of the crime, as the *Weekly Banner* will put it."

"Yes, I'd like to go there," said Bob quietly. "There may be a mystery about who killed Hiram Beegle, but to my mind there's a greater mystery in discovering how it is Chief Drayton knows the old man was killed, instead of, let us say, dying a natural death, if he can't get in the room."

"Who said he couldn't get in the room?" asked Ned.

"Well, it stands to reason he can't get in the room, if the only door to it is locked on the inside, if Hiram Beegle is dead inside; for I've been there and you can't go down the chimney. How does the chief know Hiram is dead?"

"You got me there," admitted Ned. "I didn't get it directly from Chief Drayton. Tom Wilson was telling me—he heard it from some one else, I guess."

"That's the trouble," remarked Bob as he guided the flivver around a corner and brought it to a stop in front of his uncle's hardware store. "There's too much second-hand talk."

"Then let's go over to Storm Mountain and get some first-hand information!" cried Ned.

"Yes—what do you say to that?" added Harry.

Bob considered for a moment.

"I guess I can go in about an hour if you fellows can," he replied. "Uncle Joel will let me have some time off."

"I think I can string dad so he'll let me go," remarked Ned.

"Same here," echoed Harry.

The two lads worked for their respective fathers, and the latter were not too exacting. Bob and his chums attended High School, but owing to the fact that the building was being repaired the usual fall term would be two months late in opening. Hence they still had considerable of a vacation before them, for which they were duly grateful.

Many thoughts were surging through the mind of Bob Dexter as he went about his duties in the hardware store. It was rather a shock to him to learn that the odd but kindly old man, with whom he had been drinking buttermilk less than twenty-four hours ago, was now dead.

"But who killed him, and why?" mused Bob. "He was fearfully afraid of some one he called Rod Marbury. Could that fellow have had a hand in it? And if the old man was locked in his strong room how could anyone get in to kill him? I should like to find out all about this, and I'm going to."

Uncle Joel chuckled silently when Bob asked if.

he could be excused for the remainder of the day.

"Going fishing, Bob?" he asked.

"No, not exactly," was the answer.

"Well, I can guess. You'll be heading for Storm Mountain, I suppose."

"Did you hear about the murder?" exclaimed the lad.

"Murder!" repeated his uncle. "I didn't hear there was a murder. Old Hiram Beegle was badly hurt but he wasn't killed. He was robbed, though —robbed of some treasure box he had."

"Robbed!" murmured Bob. "The treasure box! It must have been that brass-bound little chest he had when I saw him. But are you sure he wasn't killed, Uncle Joel?"

"Well, I'm as sure of it as I can be of anything that Sam Drayton tells."

"You mean Chief Drayton of Storm Mountain?"

"Huh! Chief Drayton! I like that. He's nothing but a constable, and never will be anything but a constable. He calls himself chief because the selectmen wouldn't raise his salary. I've known Sam Drayton ever since he was knee high to a grasshopper and he's no more fit to be Chief of Police than I am—not half as much as you are, Bob Dexter, though I don't set any great store by your detective work."

Bob smiled. His uncle poked good-natured fun at his abilities as a sleuth, but, at the same time,

Uncle Joel was rather proud of his nephew, particularly since the affair of the Golden Eagle.

"Well, I'm glad the old man isn't dead," said Bob. "But how did the robbery happen? How did the thief get in the strong room?"

"I don't know. You'd better go over and find out for yourself. There's no use asking Sam Drayton, for he won't know."

"I understand he came over here to get help from our police," stated Bob.

"I don't know that he's much better off than if he stayed at home," chuckled Mr. Dexter. "But go ahead, Bob. I guess the store will still be doing business when you get back."

"I hope so, Uncle Joel. Thanks," and Bob ran out to his flivver, intending to hurry and pick up Ned and Harry and make a quick trip to Storm Mountain.

However, he found his chums already on hand. They had come over to get him, having prevailed on their fathers to let them off for the remainder of the day.

"Old Rip Van Winkle isn't dead after all—that was a false report, Bob!" exclaimed Ned, who, with Harry, insisted on giving Hiram Beegle the name of Irving's mythical character.

"So I heard."

"But there's been a big robbery," said Harry.

"I heard that, too."

"Say, is there anything you haven't heard?" inquired Ned, admiringly.

"Well, that's really all I do know," admitted Bob. "I haven't any particulars and it seems as much of a mystery as before. Let's go!"

They found a curious throng gathered about the lonely cabin of the old man, with Chief Drayton fussing about trying to keep the crowd back.

"Don't tramp all over the place!" he kept saying. "How am I goin' to examine for footprints of the robber if you tramp and mush all over the place? Keep back!"

But it was a waste of words to admonish the curiosity seekers who crowded up toward the front door. Then out came Chief Miles Duncan of the Cliffside police. He noticed Bob and his chums in the forefront of the gathering.

"Hello, Bob!" he greeted pleasantly. "This is one of those things you'll be interested in—quite a mystery. Come in and take a look."

"Now look here—!" began Sam Drayton.

"It's all right—Bob can do more with this than you or I could," said the Cliffside official in a low voice. "I'll tell you about him later. He's got the makings of a great detective in him."

Bob, much pleased at the invitation, started to push his way through the crowd, envious murmurs accompanying him.

"Stick by me, fellows," he told Ned and Bob. "We'll all go in together."

"Say, look here!" objected Sam Drayton as he saw three lads approaching, "Chief Duncan only told Bob Dexter to come in and——"

"These are my assistants," said Bob gravely, but, at the same time winking at Chief Duncan. And Mr. Duncan winked back.

"That's right," he backed up Bob.

"Oh, well, let 'em in then," grudgingly conceded Mr. Drayton.

Bob's first sight, on entering the main room of the log cabin, was of Hiram Beegle propped up in a chair covered with bed quilts. The old man looked worn and ill—there was a drawn, pinched look on his face, and he was pale.

"What happened, Mr. Beegle?" asked Bob, noting that the door to the strong room stood ajar, and that the oaken chest, in one corner, was also open.

Hiram Beegle opened his mouth, but instead of words there came out only a meaningless jumble of sounds.

"He's been poisoned," explained Chief Duncan.

"Poisoned?" cried Bob.

"Or something like that," went on the Cliffside official. "It's dope, or something that the robber gave him—maybe it's choloform, for all I can tell,

though it doesn't smell like that. Anyhow he's knocked out and can't tell much that's happened."

"Robbed! Robbed!" gasped Hiram Beegle, bringing out the words with pitiful effort.

"Yes, he's been robbed—we're sure of that," said Sam Drayton.

"Box! Box!" and again the old man in the chair brought out the words as if they pained him.

"That's right," assented the Storm Mountain chief. "As near as we can make out he's been robbed of some sort of a small treasure chest. It was taken from that larger chest in there."

"Yes, I know about it," said Bob quietly.

"You know about it?" cried both chiefs at once.

"I mean I saw the small treasure box Mr. Beegle speaks of," said Bob. "I brought him home yesterday with it. But what I can't understand is how the robber got in the strong room."

"No, and there can't anybody else either, I reckon," declared Mr. Drayton. "It's a big mystery."

"Mysteries seem to be about the best little thing Bob runs into lately," chuckled Harry. "He doesn't more than get finished with one, than he has another on his hands. Why don't you open a shop, Bob?"

"Cut out the comedy," advised Ned in a low voice to his chum. "Can't you see that these self-important chiefs don't like this kind of talk—especially this Storm Mountain fellow?"

It was evident that this was so, and Harry, with a wink at Ned, subsided.

"I'd like to hear how it all happened, and I suppose Bob would, too," remarked Mr. Duncan.

"I'd like to hear the details," suggested the young detective.

"We'll tell you all we know, Bob," said Miles Duncan. "You see——"

But at that moment a loud and hearty voice from without cried:

"Where is he! Where's my old friend Hiram Beegle? Tell him Jolly Bill Hickey is here! Where's my old friend Hiram Beegle!"

A man, broadly smiling, his bald head shining in the sun, stumped into the room, one wooden leg making a thumping sound on the floor.

CHAPTER V

A MYSTERIOUS ROBBERY

JOLLY BILL HICKEY—for so he called himself—stood staring in the middle of the room—staring at the huddled figure of the old man in the chair covered with bed clothes.

"Why, Hiram—why—what has happened?" cried the man with the wooden leg—an old-fashioned wooden peg, his stump strapped fast to it—and the wooden leg showed signs of wear. "What has happened to my old shipmate Hiram?" demanded Jolly Bill Hickey.

Again that pitiful effort to talk, but only a meaningless jumble of sounds came forth.

"Hiram, did they ram you?" demanded he of the wooden leg. "Did they let go a broadside at you? Did they try to sink you?"

Hiram Beegle nodded his head.

"Look here!" spluttered Chief Drayton. "You're not supposed to come in here, you know."

"But I *am* in, you see!" chuckled the wooden-legged man. "I am in and I'm going to stay with my old messmate Hiram. You can't keep Jolly Bill Hickey out when he wants to come in."

That was very evident.

"Are you a friend of his?" asked Chief Duncan.

"Am I? I should say I was! Ask him—ask Hiram! But no, what's the use. He's been rammed—the enemy has broadsided him and he's out of action. But I'll tell you I'm a friend of his, and he'll tell you so, too, when he gets going again. But what happened here? Tell me—tell Jolly Bill Hickey!" demanded he of the wooden leg.

"Hiram Beegle has been nearly killed and completely robbed," said Chief Duncan.

"No! You don't mean it! Almost killed—and robbed! Who did it? Where are the scoundrels?" Jolly Bill Hickey did not seem very jolly now. He looked around with a vindictive air and fanned his bald head with his cap.

"That's what we're here to find out," spoke Chief Drayton. "Do you know anything about this crime?"

"Do I know anything about it? Say, I just got here!" exclaimed Jolly Bill. "I came in on the morning train to see my old messmate Hiram Beegle, and I find this crowd around his bunk and him knocked out like a broadside had been delivered right in his teeth! How should I know anything about it?"

"Well, I just asked," said Chief Drayton rather mildly for a police official. Truth to tell the manner of Jolly Bill Hickey was a bit overpowering.

"If you're a friend of Hiram's you might as well

stay in and see if you can help us," suggested Chief Duncan.

"Sure I'll help!" said Jolly Bill. "But we don't want too much help. Who are these lads?" and he glanced sharply at Bob and his chums.

"Friends of mine," said the Cliffside chief, shortly.

"Oh, well, then that's all right—friends of yours—friends of Jolly Bill Hickey. Shake!" He extended a hard palm and gave the lads grips they long remembered. "Shake, Hiram!" and he clasped hands with the stricken man, though more gently, it seemed.

"No use letting all outdoors in," went on Jolly Bill as he stumped over and closed the outer portal, bringing thereby a chorus of protests from the curious ones assembled outside. "Now let's spin the yarn," he suggested. "But first has anything been done for my old messmate Hiram Beegle?"

"A doctor has been here—yes," said Chief Drayton. "He says Hiram has had a shock. There's a lump on his head——"

"He got that yesterday!" broke in Bob. "I picked him up right after it happened. He thinks a man named Rod Marbury did it."

"And he did!" burst forth Jolly Bill. "A scoundrel if ever there was one—Rod Marbury! So he whanged Hiram, did he?"

"There are two lumps on Hiram's head," went

on Chief Drayton. "We know about the first one —the one you spoke of," he said to Bob. "But he was hit again last night. He was also either given some sort of poison that knocked him out —some sort of dope, the doctor thinks, or else it was some sort of vapor that made him unconscious. And while he was that way he was robbed."

"But how did it all happen?" asked Bob Dexter. "How could a thief get in the strong room when he didn't know the secret of the big brass key?"

"Whoever it was must have known some of the secrets," said the Cliffside chief, "for he got in the strong room when it was locked, and when Hiram was inside, and the thief got out again, leaving Hiram and the key inside."

"He got out leaving Mr. Beegle and the key inside?" asked Bob. "Why, it couldn't be done! There's no way out of that room except by the door, and if the key was inside, and the door locked —why, it's impossible! Mr. Beegle showed me that yesterday afternoon. The only opening to the outer air is the chimney—no man could get in or out that way."

"But somebody did!" said Chief Drayton. "And that's where the mystery comes in."

"Let's hear how it happened—from the beginning," suggested Harry. "Suppose you tell your story first, Bob, so we'll know just how much of it you saw."

"Do you want me to tell, Mr. Beegle?" asked Bob, for he remembered his promise to the old man.

Hiram Beegle tried to talk, but about the only words Bob could distinguish were "cupboard" and "key." He judged from this that the old sailor, for so he seemed to be, did not want disclosed the information as to where he kept the big brass key of his strange strong room. The key was not now in sight, but Bob understood. He resolved to keep quiet on this point, but to tell the rest.

Thereupon he related how he had found the old man stricken beside the road the afternoon before. How he had gone with him to the office of Judge Weston, who told of the brass-bound box coming as an inheritance to Hiram Beegle from Hank Denby.

"That's right!" chimed in Jolly Bill. "I can testify to that. We were all shipmates together—Hiram, Hank, that scoundrel Rod Marbury and me. Hank Denby was the richest of the lot. He left the box to Hiram—I know he promised to, and what Hank promised he carried out. He gave you the box, didn't he, Hiram?"

The stricken man nodded.

"Well, I brought him home here with the box," went on Bob, "and he brought me into this room. He explained how it could only be entered from the door which he unlocked with a big brass key. He

said he was going to put his treasure in that chest," and the lad pointed to the open one in the strong room.

"He did put it there, it seems," said Chief Duncan, "but it didn't stay there long. In the night somebody got in and took the little treasure chest away, nearly killing Hiram before doing so. Then they left him locked up in the room, with the brass key near him, and came out."

"But how could they?" cried Bob. "They couldn't get out of the room if it was locked. They couldn't leave the key inside. There's no other way of getting out except by the door. And if that was locked, and the key was inside——"

"That's where the mystery comes in," interrupted Chief Duncan.

"And it sure is a mystery," added Chief Drayton. "If Hiram could talk he might explain, but, as it is, we can only guess at it. I needed help on this—that's why I sent for you, Miles," he said to his fellow officer.

"Hum! I don't know as I can do much more than you," ruefully replied the Cliffside chief. "What do you think of it, Bob?"

"Huh! A lot he can tell!" sniffed Mr. Drayton.

"You don't know Bob Dexter as well as I do," stated Mr. Duncan quietly. "I should like to have his opinion on this."

For the Cliffside chief remembered the case of

Jennie Thorp, in which he and his men had not shone very brilliantly.

"Let me see if I understand this," said Bob, looking at Hiram Beegle. "Will you nod your head if I'm right?" he asked. "Don't try to talk—just nod your head, will you?"

Hiram gave a sign of assent and understanding. Then Bob began to make a statement of the mysterious robbery as he understood it, while those in the room listened eagerly.

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE MARKS

"WHEN I left you yesterday afternoon, after we drank the buttermilk together," said Bob, speaking slowly, "you were going to put the brass-bound box in your chest and lock it up, weren't you?"

Hiram Beegle nodded vigorously an assent to this.

"You did this, we'll say," resumed Bob, "but after I had gone, or after you had locked up your treasure, you took it out to look at it again, and count it perhaps—and you sat here in your strong room to do that—with the door open—is that it?"

Again Hiram nodded to show that this was the truth.

"While you were doing that," continued the young detective, "some one—an enemy or a robber—slipped in and overpowered you, taking away the treasure box and locking you in the strong room. Is that how it happened? And can you tell us who it was that struck you the second time and who robbed you?"

Hiram Beegle nodded vigorously, but in both directions. Now his head indicated an affirmative and again a negative.

"What does he mean?" questioned Harry.

"He's making queer motions," said Ned.

The stricken man was moving in an odd way the fingers of his right hand on the arm of his chair. And then Bob Dexter guessed what it was he wanted.

"He will write it out!" exclaimed the lad. "Give him pencil and paper and he can write out what happened since he can't talk straight. Why didn't we think of that before?"

"I said it would be a good thing to have Bob here," remarked Chief Duncan while Chief Drayton looked for pencil and paper. And when these were given to Hiram Beegle a look of satisfaction came over his face. He began writing more rapidly than one would have supposed an old sailor could have done, and he handed the finished sheet to Bob.

"Read it," suggested Harry.

Bob read:

"The young man has partly the right of it. After he left me I locked up the box Judge Weston gave me. It was mine by right but I knew some who might try to take it from me. Never mind about them now.

"After supper I sat here thinking of many things, and then I wanted to look in my box again. I opened my strong room, left the door ajar, took the brass-bound box out of my chest and sat looking over the contents when, all of a sudden, I felt

faint. Then I fell out of my chair—I remember falling—and that's all I remember until I woke up early this morning.

"I was lying on the floor, and beside me, close to my right hand, was the big brass key to my strong room. But the door was locked, and my box was gone. I couldn't understand it. First I thought I had just fainted from the blow I got in the afternoon. I thought maybe I had put my box back in the chest, but it wasn't there. I had been robbed, and there was another lump on my head. Whether I was hit again, or whether I hit myself when I fell out of my chair I don't know.

"But there I was, locked in my own strong room, the key was beside me and my treasure was gone. That's all I know about it."

"But didn't he see anybody?"

"How did he feel just before he keeled over?"

"Didn't he hear any noise?"

"Did anybody make him drink anything that might have had poison or knock-out drops in it?"

These were some of the questions from Ned, Harry, Jolly Bill and the two police chiefs when Bob finished reading the document.

"Wait!" begged the young detective. "One at a time. I'll ask him the questions and let him write the answer. We'll get along faster that way."

"Let's see, first, how he got doped, if he was,"

suggested Chief Duncan. So Bob wrote that question.

"No one gave me anything that I know of," was the written reply. "And the only thing I drank was some buttermilk."

"I had some of that and I know there was nothing wrong with it," testified Bob. "But did you see any one around your cabin just before you fainted and were robbed?"

"I saw no one," wrote Hiram. "It was very strange."

"I'll say it was!" exclaimed Harry.

"What did you do after you came to?" was the next question.

"I sat up and looked around. I couldn't understand it at all. I felt sick—I couldn't talk—something seemed to have hold of my tongue. It's that way yet but I can feel it wearing off. I saw that I had been robbed.

"But the queer part of it was that whoever had robbed me had gone out, locked the door from the outside and then, in some way, they got the key back in here, so that it lay on the floor close to my right hand, as if it had dropped from my fingers."

"Why, that's easy!" chuckled Jolly Bill. "They locked the door—that is the robber did, and threw the key in over the transom. I've heard of cases like that."

"There isn't any transom over this door," said

Bob, pointing. "There isn't a single opening to this room, either from inside the cabin or out of doors. The keyhole is the only opening, and it is impossible to push a big key, like this, in through the keyhole."

"I have it!" cried Ned. "They climbed up on the roof and dropped the key down the chimney. You said the chimney was barred inside, and too small for a man to climb down, Bob, but a key could fall down."

"Yes," admitted the young detective dryly, "a key would fall down all right, but it would drop in the fireplace, or in the ashes of the fire if one had been built. Mr. Beegle says the key was lying close to his hand, and he was on the floor, ten feet away from the hearth. That won't do, Ned."

"Couldn't the key bounce from the brick hearth, over to where Mr. Beegle lay?" asked the lad, who hated to see his theory riddled like this.

In answer Bob pointed to the hearth. There was a thick layer of wood ashes on it, for a fire had been burning in the place recently.

"Any key dropping in those ashes would fall as dead as a golf ball in a mud bank," stated the young sleuth. "It wouldn't bounce a foot, let alone ten feet, and land close beside Mr. Beegle's hand."

"Then there must be two keys, or else the door was locked with a skeleton key," said Harry.

"No! No!" suddenly exclaimed the stricken man. He wrote rapidly.

"There is only one key, and no skeleton key would fit this lock," which was easy to believe when its ponderous nature was taken into consideration.

"Um!" mused Harry, when this had been read to those in the room. "Then it's simmering down to a question of who it was knocked him out, and how they managed to lock the door after they had left with the treasure, and how they got the key back inside."

"That's the question," assented Bob.

"But why should the thief go to such trouble to get the key back in the room, after he had left Mr. Beegle unconscious?" asked Ned. "That's what I can't understand."

"He probably did it to throw suspicion off," suggested Bob. "By leaving the key close to Mr. Beegle's hand he might have thought his victim would come to the conclusion that he hadn't been robbed at all—or else that in a sort of dream or sleep-walking act he had taken away his own valuables and hidden them."

"Of course that's possible," said Chief Duncan.

"No! No!" cried Hiram, with more power than he had yet spoken since he was stricken. Once more he quickly wrote:

"I did not hide that box. Why should I? It was mine and is yet, no matter who has it. Some

one sneaked in here while I was looking at my treasure and overpowered me with some powerful drug, I believe—some sort of gas, maybe the kind they used in the Great War. When I toppled over they came in, got the box, went out and locked me in."

"But how could they get out and lock you in?" asked Chief Duncan. "The key was here with you all the while."

Hiram Beegle shook his head. It was beyond his comprehension, and, for that matter, beyond the comprehension of all present. Even Bob Dexter, skillful and clever as he was, shook his head.

"I don't see how the key got back here," he mused. "But there are some other things to find out yet. How did this robbery become known? Did any one find Mr. Beegle in the strong room? They couldn't see him lying there, for there aren't any windows. There aren't any panes of glass in the door. Did he call for help? And if he did, how did he get the key out to some one to come in and pick him up?"

He didn't have to do that," said Chief Drayton. "He managed to crawl to the door and unlock it himself. Then he staggered out doors and hailed Tom Shan, a neighboring farmer, who was driving past. Shan did what he could and then came and told me."

"I see," murmured Bob Dexter. "Then the two

important points in this mystery are to discover who robbed Mr. Beegle and how it was they got the key back in the room after they went out and locked the door. And that's the hardest nut to crack, for there isn't any opening in this room through which a key could be put back."

"Except the chimney," commented Jolly Bill.

"We've eliminated that," declared Bob. "But, just to be on the safe side, I'll climb up on the roof and drop the key down. We'll see where it lands."

"Better first find out where the key really was," suggested Ned. "I mean where Mr. Beegle was lying on the floor with the key near his hand."

"A good idea," declared Bob. "Can you show us how it was?" he asked.

The old man seemed rapidly to be getting better, for he arose from his chair and tottered into his strong room. There he stretched out on the floor in the position he had found himself in when he became conscious. He laid the key in the position where he had first noted it on opening his eyes.

"Well, we have that to start with," remarked Bob, as the old man arose and went back to his chair. "I'll just mark the spot on the floor with a pencil." As he stooped over to do this he seemed to take notice of something, for Ned saw his chum give a little start.

"Did you get a clew then, Bob?" he asked.

"A clew? No—no clews here, I'm afraid."

"I thought you saw something."

"No—nothing to amount to anything. Now I'll get up on the roof and drop the key down. You fellows stay here and tell me where it lands. I'll try it half a dozen times."

They helped Hiram Beegle back to his blanketed chair, and by this time the doctor had come back. He said his patient was much better and that gradually all the effects of the attack would wear off.

"But you had better not stay here all alone," the physician suggested. "I stopped at Tom Shan's on my way here and he and his wife want you to come and stay with them a few days. You'll be well taken care of there."

"Yes—yes," slowly assented Hiram. "I'll—go. There's nothing here, now, to be taken. They have my treasure."

He spoke sadly, as one who has lost hope.

"We'll get it back for you," said Chief Duncan cheerfully.

"Sure we will!" cried Jolly Bill. "I'll get in the wake of that scoundrel Rod Marbury and take it away from him. Trust an old messmate for that!"

He seemed so hale and hearty that one could not help having a friendly feeling for him, and his weather-beaten face shone with the honesty of his purpose, while his shiny bald head seemed to give promise of a brighter sun rising on the affairs of Hiram Beegle.

"I'll take you over to Shan's place now, in my car," offered Dr. Martin. "You need rest and quiet more than anything else. The police will look after things here."

"Yes, we'll look after things," promised Chief Drayton. "I'll lock up the cabin and bring you the key after this young man gets through dropping the key down the chimney, though I don't see what good it's going to do. I'll lock up the place for you."

"There isn't much—to—to lock up—now," said the old man slowly. "The treasure is gone!"

"Oh, we'll get it back!" promised Chief Duncan. "What was in the box—diamonds or gold?"

"Neither one," was the answer.

"Neither one? Then what was the treasure?" Chief Drayton wanted to know.

"Papers! Papers!" somewhat testily answered Mr. Beegle.

"Oh, stocks and bonds, I reckon. Well, you can stop payment on them. Better tell Judge Weston about it."

"Yes! Yes! He must be told," mumbled Hiram. "Now I want to sleep."

He closed his eyes weakly, and the physician and others helped him into the auto. Bob had taken the big brass key, and as he and his chums went outside, followed by the police officers and a curious crowd, the young detective said to Jolly Bill:

"How long have you known Mr. Beegle?"

"Off and on all my life."

"Do you know anything about this Rod Marbury and what sort of inheritance it was that Mr. Denby left?"

"I don't know anything good about Rod Marbury," was the answer. "As for Hiram's treasure, well, I can tell a story about that if you want me to."

"I wish you would," said Bob, as he looked about for a way of getting up on the roof to drop the key down the chimney in the experiment. "It might help some in solving the mystery."

Ned, who had gone on ahead a little way, around the side of the house where the chimney was built, suddenly uttered a cry of surprise.

"Look at these queer marks!" he called. He pointed to broad, flat impressions in the soft ground —impressions as though made by the foot of an elephant!

CHAPTER VII

THE KEY EXPERIMENT

BOB DEXTER, when he had caught sight of the curious marks, to which attention was called by his chum Ned, found himself wishing that he was a little more alone on this mystery case.

"There are altogether too many cooks here—they'll spoil the broth," mused Bob, as he saw the ever-growing crowd following him and his companions around to the side of the cabin where the chimney of the fireplace was erected.

True though the "murder" had turned out to be only a mysterious robbery, coupled with an assault on the old hermit, and in this way spoiling a sensation, there was still much curiosity regarding everything connected with the matter. Even though Hiram had been taken away in the physician's automobile.

"Where they going?" asked more than one in the throng, as he followed the milling crowd, when the police chiefs, Bob and his two chums and Jolly Bill Hickey had started away from the front door of the cabin. "What are they after?"

"I guess they think the murderer is hiding around here," was one of the answers.

"Shucks! There ain't been no murder!" declared a teamster who had left his load of sand near the home of Hiram Beegle. "It's only a robbery, and not much of one at that. I'm going to quit!"

Then, unexpectedly, there came a burst of hand organ music out in front, and Storm Mountain was such an isolated place that even the wheezy tones of an ancient hand organ was sufficient to create diversion. Coupled with this was a cry from some one:

"He's got a monkey!"

This was enough to attract away most of the crowd that was following Bob and his friends (much to the annoyance of the young detective) so that by the time he reached the place of the queer marks, to which Ned had referred, the most interested investigators had that side of the cabin comparatively to themselves. And by the term "most interested investigators," I mean Bob and the police chiefs. Of course, Jolly Bill Hickey, a lifelong messmate of the stricken man, must be included. And, of course, Ned and Harry were always anxious to help Bob.

The wheezy organ continued to grind out its "music," if such it could be called, and accompanying it was the shrill chatter of a monkey. The crowd of men and youths laughed in delight. It did not take much to make a Storm Mountain crowd laugh.

"Well, I'm glad that dago happened along," re-

marked Bob to Ned, as he bent over the marks in the soft ground.

"Do you mean you think he can help you solve this mystery?" asked Harry.

"No, but he'll keep the crowd back while we experiment with the key by dropping it down the chimney, though I know now what the result will be."

"Yes, he'll keep the crowd busy," agreed Ned. "But what do you suppose these marks are, Bob?"

Well might he ask that, for the impressions were curious. They were about a foot in diameter, and roughly circular in shape. As much as anything they resembled the marks left by an elephant's foot.

And yet it needed but an instant's thought to shatter that theory. There had been no small circus in the vicinity of Cliffside in many months. The place was not large enough to attract the large traveling shows. And even if it had been no show would go so far off the beaten path as to ascend Storm Mountain with a herd of elephants.

Granting that a circus had been there, and that a lone elephant had wandered off to tramp around the lonely cabin of Hiram Beegle, the marks were too few in number to have been made by any normal elephant.

"What are they, Bob?" asked Ned again. "How could they be made by an elephant?"

The young detective did not answer for a moment, but he was rapidly thinking. The elephant idea was

absurd, of course. An elephant has four feet. Taking ten steps would result in forty marks having been made, and there were not half this number visible. Granting that an elephant could jump from one stand to another, and so leaving a place without any marks for a considerable distance, did not fit in with the theory.

"I can tell you what made these marks," broke out Jolly Bill with his characteristic laugh, while Bob was on the verge of saying something.

"What did?" asked Harry. "A bird?"

"No," replied the bald-headed, and wooden-legged man who had appeared so unexpectedly on the scene, claiming to be a friend of Hiram Beegle. "No! They were made by some one carrying a sack of potatoes, and setting it down every now and then to rest. Isn't that it, my young detective friend?" he asked, appealing to Bob. If the latter wondered how Jolly Bill knew his claims to being a sleuth, the lad said nothing. He only remarked:

"Yes, a heavy bag of potatoes, set here and there to ease the arms of whoever was carrying it, would make just such marks as these."

"That's right!" cried Chief Drayton. "I'd never have thought of that—a potato sack sure enough! What do you know about that? I s'pose, Chief," he went on, addressing the head of the Cliffside police, "that it wasn't a sack of potatoes though, at all."

"What do you mean—not a sack of potatoes?" asked Mr. Duncan.

"Well, I mean the scoundrel that robbed old Hiram Beegle piled his booty in a potato sack and carried it off this way. He left us a good clew, I'll say. We can see jist which way he went with his potato sack full of booty!"

The chief seemed to relish this word "booty," rolling it around on his tongue as if it were a choice tidbit.

"We've got him now!" he declared. "Come on over this way!"

"Just a moment!" spoke Chief Duncan. "We came out here to let Bob experiment with a key dropped down the chimney. We want to see if it was possible for the thief to have assaulted Hiram, gone out, locked the door after him and then have gotten the key back inside."

"Sure we want to find that out," agreed the Storm Mountain police force.

"Well, let's stick to business," proposed Mr. Duncan.

"What, and let this feller get away with his potato sack of booty?"

"There wasn't any potato sack or any other kind of a sack of booty!" somewhat testily declared Mr. Duncan. "The only thing stolen was a small box belonging to Hiram. The thief could have tucked

it under his arm. He didn't need to carry it in a sack."

"Oh," murmured Mr. Drayton, somewhat crestfallen, "that's so. I forgot about the booty being in a small box. But who was here with a sack of potatoes?" he demanded, as if no one could answer.

"Might have been Hiram himself," suggested Jolly Bill. "He always was a great hand for potatoes when he and I were shipmates together. Like as not he lugged some spuds in for the winter."

"Or some farmer may have brought him a bag," added Harry. "I guess, Ned, this clew isn't going to amount to anything."

"Just my luck!" said Ned with a quizzical smile. "We'll have to let Bob work this out. What say, Bob?"

"It looks as if it was a sack of potatoes that had been set down and picked up again, several times," answered the young detective. "I guess it doesn't mean anything in connection with this robbery. Though, of course, it won't do any harm to ask Mr. Beegle if he carried the sack around or if some one brought him potatoes. But I'd like to try this key experiment now."

"Yes, let's clear up one thing at a time," suggested Mr. Duncan. "I can't spend all my time over in Storm Mountain. It's the folks in Cliffside who pay my salary, and I've got to do my work there."

"But I'd like to have you help me out a bit," com-

plained Chief Drayton. "Course Storm Mountain isn't any such place as Cliffside, but we police chiefs ought to stick together."

"Oh, I'll help you all I can," readily agreed Mr. Duncan. "But Bob here can do more than I can."

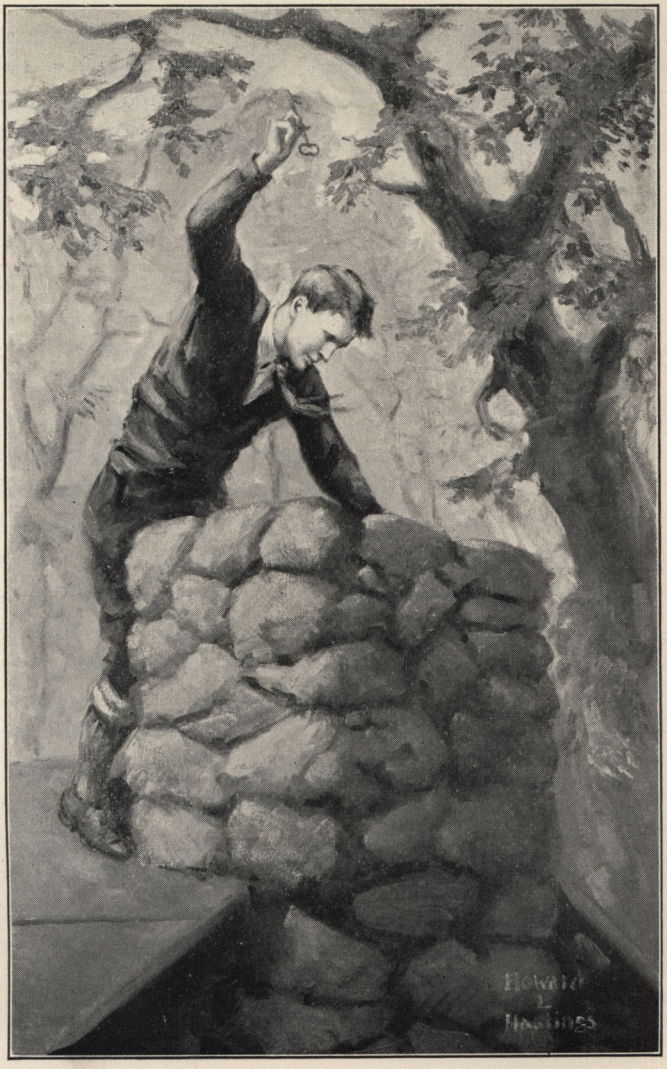
"Shucks! a youngster like him!" sniffed Mr. Drayton.

"That's all right—he's got an old head on young shoulders," declared Mr. Duncan in a low voice.

Fortunately Bob was engaged just then in climbing up a tree by which easy access could be had to the sloping roof of the log cabin. The lad carried with him the brass key, which he had first carefully examined for any marks that might lead to the discovery of anything. So Bob heard nothing of this alternating talk against him and in his favor.

His examination of the key had disclosed nothing. It was a heavy, ponderous affair, almost as if it had been made by a local locksmith who might have forged it by hand, as he might also have done in respect to the lock on the strong room where Hiram Beegle had been overpowered and robbed.

And aside from numerous scratches on the key Bob could see nothing. The scratches, he knew, must have come there naturally, for they would have resulted from the many times Hiram must have taken the lock-opener from his secret niche and put it back. Also, the key would have been scratched by being put in and taken out of the lock.



"ALL READY—DROP THE KEY!" CALLED UP CHIEF DRAYTON.

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"And as for looking for fingerprints on it, I don't believe it would be worth while to have this photographed with that end in view," thought Bob. He knew the value of fingerprint comparisons as a means of tracing criminals.

But Bob knew the brass key had passed through many hands that very morning, since the discovery of the crime. And Hiram's own fingers and thumbs would have left on the surface marks that would have obliterated any of the whorls, curves and twists of the criminal.

As you doubtless know if you take up a shiny piece of metal in your fingers you will leave on it the impression of the tips, or balls, of your fingers or thumbs, as is also the case if you thus handle a piece of looking-glass. And it is possible, by taking a photograph of these marks, to get a picture of the fingerprints of the person handling the metal or glass. Sometimes prints invisible to the unaided eye are brought out in the photograph.

And by comparing these reproduced prints with the finger marks of criminals on file in all large police headquarters, it is sometimes possible to trace the guilty ones.

But Bob Dexter knew that it would be worse than useless in a case like this, for the reasons I have mentioned. So he resolved to do the next best thing, use the key to learn whether or not it was possible to have gotten it where it was found—near the hand

of the prostrate Hiram Beegle on the floor of his strong room—by dropping the lock-opener down the fireplace.

"Is any one in the room to notice where the key falls when I drop it?" asked Bob, when he was up on the roof.

"I'll go in," offered Chief Drayton. "I'd like to see just how it does fall."

"I'll wait until you call up the chimney that you're ready," said Bob. "You can call to me up the flue."

"All right, but don't drop the key down on me while I'm hollering at you," begged the Storm Mountain chief. "It's heavy and it might bang me in the eye."

"I'll be careful," promised Bob, with a smile, in which his chums joined.

The hand organ music was still wailing away out in the road, and the antics of the monkey must have been amusing, for the crowd was kept interested, and thus held away from the cabin for a time, for which Bob was glad.

The lad, up on the roof, was looking at the edges of the brick chimney, but they told him nothing. They were covered with soot from the wood smoke, and this did not appear to have been disturbed.

"Though," mused Bob to himself as he waited for word from inside, and looked at the black stuff on the chimney, "there might be all sorts of marks and evidence here and I couldn't see it without a magni-

fying glass. Guess maybe I'd better get one of those things. I'd look like a regular Sherlock Holmes with one, I reckon. But a photograph camera is better. I wonder how they could take any pictures of this black stuff?" and idly he fingered the soot on the edge of the chimney. "Guess it won't pay to bother with that on this case," he went on with his thoughts. "But if I'm going to continue in this line of work I'm going in for all that sort of thing."

He heard a slight noise down below him and stood at attention.

"All ready—drop the key!" called up Chief Drayton from within the cabin. The voice came to Bob as through a speaking tube, carried up the fireplace flue.

"Here it comes!" answered the lad.

The next instant he had dropped the brass key down the black opening.

CHAPTER VIII

JOLLY BILL'S TALE

TENSE was the silence that had fallen over the little group of experimenters—Bob on the roof of the log cabin, Ned, Harry, Chief Duncan and Jolly Bill Hickey on the ground below—Chief Drayton inside the cabin, squatting down near the embers of a dead fire on the hearth.

The key had fallen.

What was the result?

They were not long left in doubt. Up the flue came the voice of Chief Drayton reporting on the first test.

"No good!" he called to Bob.

"What do you mean?" asked the young detective, and his words, as well as those of the chief inside the cabin came plainly to his listeners.

"I mean the key just plopped into the ashes and stayed there."

"Didn't it bounce out at all?"

"Nary a bounce."

"Well, then we'll try it again."

Which they did—a dozen times or more—but always with the same result. The key fell down the flue with many a tinkle as it struck the cross pieces

of iron bars which Hiram had set in to prevent night-prowling animals from entering his strong room. Then the brass implement fell into the soft ashes where it remained.

"Well, that settles one point," declared Ned, as they all went inside the cabin after the test. "The man who robbed Mr. Beegle and locked him inside the room, putting the key back in after he went out, didn't use the chimney."

"That's right!" chimed in Harry.

"And yet what other opening is there by which the key could have been gotten back in this room, and placed close to the hand of Mr. Beegle, so it would look as if he had locked himself in, robbed himself and made himself unconscious with chloroform or something?" asked Ned. "What other opening is there?"

"None!" declared Chief Drayton. "I went all over that. Hiram made his room as tight as a bank vault. The fireplace is the only opening in or out, and the key didn't come down there!"

"There must be some other opening!" insisted Ned.

"Well, the best way is to have a look," suggested Bob. "Now the crowd seems to be gone for good, let's have a look." For the throng of curious ones had followed the organ grinder down the mountain trail, it seemed. Not often did one of these traveling musicians, if such they may be called, invade

Storm Mountain, and the simple inhabitants of that isolated and rural community welcomed their visits.

Such careful examination as Bob and his chums, with the aid of the police chiefs and Jolly Bill Hickey, gave to the strong room, or vault in the log cabin, revealed no visible means by which a large brass key could have been passed inside after the door was locked.

The keyhole theory was, obviously, not to be mentioned again. A moment's test proved the utter impossibility of forcing the key through the opening by which the lock was operated. And, granting that the key could have been pushed through the hole into which it was intended to be inserted, it would merely have dropped on the floor inside, and would not have fallen near the hand of the stricken man.

The walls of the room appeared very solid, nor was any hollow sound developed when they were tapped.

"How about a trap door in the floor?" asked Ned, when it had been fairly well established that there was no opening through the walls.

"That's so!" cried Chief Drayton. "I never thought of that! There must be a trap door!"

There wasn't much he really thought of until some one else suggested it, be it noticed.

But hopeful and feasible as this plan seemed when Ned had mentioned it, nothing developed. The

floor was smooth and without any secret flap or trap door, as far as they could see.

"Well, I guess we'll just have to give it up," said the Storm Mountain officer with a gesture of despair. "I'll have to work along the line of catching the criminal. If I do that and get back Hiram's box of valuable papers I guess that will be all I'm expected to do."

"Yes, if you do that you'll be doing well," said Chief Duncan with a laugh.

"Oh, I'll do it!" declared the other. "After all, the key mystery doesn't amount to much. I'll drop that."

But there was one present who had made up his mind not to drop the mystery of the brass key, and that individual was Bob Dexter. For here was a mystery just to his liking—no sordid crime was involved, nothing like a sensational murder, such as rumor first had it—only a mysterious robbery, and that of papers which perhaps were of value only to the recent inheritor of them.

"I'll have a go at it!" Bob Dexter told himself. "But I want to look around when there aren't so many present. I'm not altogether satisfied that it isn't possible to get a key in through the walls of this strong room. And I'd like to know why Hiram Beegle built such a strong room. What did he have to guard? What was he afraid of, or, rather, of

whom was he afraid? I'd like to find out about these things, and I'm going to."

He was enlightened on some of these points sooner than he expected.

With the taking away of Hiram by the physician, to the home of Tom Shan, where the old man would be nursed back to health, there was little more that could be done at the lonely log cabin.

"I'll just lock it up and keep the key," said Chief Drayton who, in the absence of any relatives of the old man, would seem to have this right under the law. "I'll keep the brass key, too, though I reckon there isn't much left in here to steal."

They were in the strong room at the time, taking a final look around, and the empty chest in the corner bore mute evidence of the futility of keeping guard over the place. Other things of Hiram's than the brass-bound box might have been taken, but he said nothing about them. His most valuable treasure seemed to be that which Judge Weston had given him the day before, and now that was gone.

"Yes, lock up and we'll get out," suggested Chief Duncan. "I've got to be getting back to Cliffside. You boys coming with me?" he looked at Ned and Harry.

"We'll ride back with Bob in his Rolls Royce," chuckled Harry.

"All right, but don't speed in my territory or I'll have to lock you up," laughed the police head.

"And I think I'll be pulling up my mud hook and making for some port myself," said Jolly Bill Hickey with a laugh. "There isn't any hotel around here," he added as he stumped around on his wooden leg. "How about it over in your port, my lads?" and he looked at Bob and his chums.

"There's the Mansion House," Harry informed him.

"Suits me!" cried Jolly Bill. "I came here to spend a few days with my old shipmate Hiram Beegle, but since he's in the sick bay I'll have to make other plans. So I'll stay at the Mansion House for a while. I've got the shot in my locker to pay my passage, too!" he cried, pulling out a plump wallet, and showing it with a flourish. "Don't be afraid that the Mansion House will see me skipping my board bill, even if I have a wooden leg," and he tapped against his tree-like ember a heavy knurled and knobbed stick that assisted him in his hobbling walk.

"That's between you and the Mansion House," observed Ned.

"If you like I'll drive you down," offered Bob. "You know you said you could tell us something about Mr. Beegle," he added as he and his chums were left alone with this odd bald-headed character, while the two police chiefs saw to securing the cabin. The crowd of curious ones seemed to have followed

the organ grinder away, as did the children after the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

"That's what I said, and that's what I'll do!" cried Jolly Bill. "I can tell you almost as much about old Hiram Beegle as he can himself. Man and boy we sailed together!"

"Come on then," urged Bob.

Jolly Bill, chuckling to himself as if at some joke he had not shared with the others, stumped in the wake of Ned and Harry as Bob led the way to where he had parked his flivver.

"I can talk while we breeze along," said the odd character as he took his place beside Bob, Ned and Harry occupying the rear seat. "For when I get to the Mansion House I'm going to take a rest. I've traveled a long way to get here. Thought I'd be in time for old Hank Denby's funeral, but I missed him."

"Do you know him?" asked Bob.

"I did, son," replied Jolly Bill with the trace of an accent on the second word. "I knew him well. Had a letter from him just before he went on his last long voyage. Pals we were—Hank and I and Hiram."

"What about Rod Marbury?" asked Bob.

"Bah! That pest and scoundrel! He sailed with us, of course, but he wasn't a true messmate in the real meaning of the name. You never could trust

Rod Marbury—that's why Hiram built his strong room."

"I was wondering why he had the place so much like a bank vault, with the key hid in a secret place," spoke Bob.

"Secret place—for the key—say, boy, what do you know about that?" cried Jolly Bill, all the jollity gone from him now. "What do you know?" and he gripped Bob's arm, so that the latter had to shake loose the grip in order to steer down the trail.

"Don't do that again," he said, somewhat sharply. "This is a bad hill."

"Excuse me," murmured Bill, obviously ashamed of his show of feeling. "But I was wondering if Hiram had showed you any of his secrets."

Conscious that he had made a mistake in betraying any knowledge of the place where the old man hid the key to his strong room, Bob tried to shift it off with a laugh as he said:

"Oh, well, it stands to reason that careful as Mr. Beegle was of that room, he'd keep the key to it in a secret place, wouldn't he?"

"Oh, yes, I reckon he would," admitted Jolly Bill. "I see what you mean. I beg your pardon."

Bob was glad it had passed off this way, for, truth to tell, he had not meant to say what he did.

"Well, Mr. Hickey, we're ready to hear your story," said Harry, when they had reached a place

in the road from Storm Mountain where the going was safer and easier. "It seems like a sort of pirate yarn to me."

"Pirate yarn!" cried Jolly Bill. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you three—or four if you like to count in Rod Marbury——"

"I don't like to count Rod in and I'm not going to!" cried Bill.

"Well, then, you three, yourself, Mr. Beegle and Mr. Denby—seem to have been associated in some voyages where you got wealth—not to say a fortune," went on Harry.

"No, not a fortune—considerable money, but far from a fortune," said Jolly Bill. "Enough for us to live on without risking our lives going aloft in a storm, but not much more. I'll spin you the yarn."

He settled himself comfortably in the auto and began:

"Originally there were four of us, Hiram, Hank, myself and that rat Rodney Marbury. We sailed together many a year, putting up with hard work and worse food in good ships and bad ships. We were wrecked together and saved together more than once.

"Then, one day, Hank struck it rich—that is he got hold of an old sailor who was dying. This sailor had been what I reckon you might call a pirate if there are such critters nowadays—or were

then. And this fellow had gotten possession of a store of gold. It was where it couldn't be come at easy—hidden on an island in the South Seas, to be exact, but he had papers and a map to show just where it was, and these papers and map he gave to Hank Denby.

"Now we four—that is before we knew what a rat and skunk Rod Marbury was, had made a vow to share and share alike if ever one of us got rich. So when Hank got possession of these papers showing where some gold—and a good store there was of it—was buried on an island in the South Seas, of course he told us. And we set out to get it.

"I won't bother to tell you what trouble and hardships we went through to get this hidden gold—maybe it was pirate gold—I don't know. We had to work and save and scrimp—live as low as we could—until we could make a trip together to this island."

"And did you?" cried Ned, whose eyes, like those of Harry and Bob, were shining with excitement over this romantic tale.

"We did, lad, yes. We finally got to the island with the map and papers which Hank Denby always carried, as was his right."

"And when you got there—" began Bob.

"The cupboard was bare!" finished Harry, laughing as he completed the old nursery rhyme. "I mean there wasn't any gold there."

"That's where you're wrong," said Jolly Bill with a smile, "for we found the gold buried just where the old map said it would be, and, what's more, we took it out—that is some of it."

"Did the natives attack you—did you have a fight or anything like that?" Harry wanted to know.

"Nope—nothing as exciting as that," replied Jolly Bill.

"Crickety! I wish I could have been there!" sighed Ned. "I've always wanted to go to the South Seas. It's nice and warm there, isn't it?" he asked. "You don't have to wear many clothes and dress up do you?"

"Not a great deal," chuckled the sailor. "Well, as I was saying, we took some of the gold."

"Why did you leave any of it?" asked Bob, curiously.

"Because—I'll tell you why—because——"

"Hark!" cautioned Ned. "Listen!"

They listened and heard, just ahead of them the strains of a hand organ.

A worried look came over the face of Jolly Bill Hickey as he stopped the telling of his curious tale.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE TRAIL

"THAT—that music!" murmured the wooden-legged sailor. "Are there two of those organ grinders? There was one playing at Hiram's cabin, and now down here—another one—I don't like it!"

"Why not?" asked Ned, struck by a peculiar look on the man's generally smiling face.

"Just superstition, I reckon," was the answer. "But I never yet heard two different hand organs close together on the same day, but what bad luck followed me. I don't like it, I tell you!"

"This isn't, necessarily, another hand organ grinder," remarked Bob as the music came nearer, or, rather the nearer they approached it, for the auto was still progressing.

"Do you mean it could be the same one we heard back at the cabin?" asked Jolly Bill. "That was five miles back. Those dagoes don't travel that fast."

"There's a short trail down Storm Mountain a man can take on foot and beat an auto that has to go by the road," explained Bob. "Or this man may have been given a lift by some motorist and have started before we did."

"Yes, I suppose so," murmured Jolly Bill. "But I'd like to make sure it's the same one."

"It is—there he stands," exclaimed Harry, pointing as they made a turn in the road, and saw the dispenser of music grinding away near a house, out in front of which were several children laughing with delight at the antics of the monkey.

Jolly Bill stared hard at the organ grinder as Bob's flivver passed him, and it may be said that the grinder also favored the party in the car with a searching glance. However, it appeared to be more of curiosity than anything else, for the man turned aside and called to his monkey, yanking on the long string that was fastened to the collar on the neck of the simian.

"Yes, it's the same one all right," murmured Jolly Bill, as they left him behind. "The same one—I'm glad of it."

He seemed to be brooding over something not connected with the matter in hand, and it was not until Harry made a remark that he took up the telling of the tale.

"Why did you leave any of the gold on the South Sea island?" the lad wanted to know.

"Oh, yes, I started to tell you when that music came along. Well, the reason was that it was Hank Denby's plan. Hank always had a better head on him than any of the rest of us—he was more business-like. Maybe that's why the old pirate sailor

picked him out to give him the map of the treasure.

"But after we'd located it and got it out—and a precious hard time we had of it to do it in secret so as not to let the natives and some of the worse whites on the island know about it—after that Hank talked to us.

"He reminded us what sailors were like—free spenders when they had anything—saving nothing against a rainy day, and he persuaded us to let him take charge of most of the money—that is the biggest parts of our three shares. He said he'd put it in a safe place and pay it out to us as we needed it. He first divided it all up fair and square—a quarter of the lot to each man—and then asked us to let him handle all of ours but a few thousands we wanted to spend right away."

"Did you agree to that?" asked Bob, who, with his chums, was eagerly interested in the tale.

"Yes, we did. We knew Hank had a better head than the rest of us, so we turned our shares over to him."

"And buried it back on that island?" asked Harry.

"Oh, no, we brought it away with us. That island was too far away and too hard to get at to leave any gold there. Hank said there was just as good hiding places in the town where he lived."

"You mean here in Cliffside?" cried Ned.

"Cliffside's the place!" announced Jolly Bill Hickey. "Hank said he could hide the money where

nobody would ever find it without a map, and that's just what he's done. And now he's dead and the map is in that brass bound box and who's got the box I don't know! It's fair maddening—that's what it is!"

Jolly Bill seemed anything but like his name then.

"But say—look here!" exclaimed Ned. "Do you mean to say that after Mr. Denby got you three to intrust the most of your shares to him, that he wouldn't give them back to you?"

"That's what he did!" exclaimed Jolly Bill. "Not but what he had a right to under the circumstances. I'll say that for him."

"What circumstances?" asked Bob.

"Well, we acted foolish," confessed the one-legged sailor, as if somewhat ashamed of himself. "At least Rod and I did, but I was led into it by that skunk. After we three had spent most of the first lot we took out of the treasure, Rod proposed that he and I and Hiram rob old Hank of all that was left—take Hank's share as well as our own.

"I fell in with the scheme, when Rod told me that Hiram was in it also, but I've found out since that this was a lie. Hiram wouldn't do it. And I wouldn't have gone into it with Rod except that he had me fozzled with strong drink. That cured me—I never touched another drop since. It was how I lost my leg."

The story was rapidly approaching a dramatic

climax, and seeing a quiet place beside the road, Bob drew the car in there and stopped it.

"That's better," commented Jolly Bill. "I can talk better when I'm not so rattled about. To make a long story short, I believed what that rat Rod told me—that he and I and Hiram, together, could steal the map of the new place where the treasure was hid, and take it from Hank. Hank had made a lot of money with his first share—he was getting to be fair rich, and we'd spent ours—that is Rod and I had, though I found out that Hiram had done almost as well as Hank had. He had some money put away for a rainy day.

"Well, one night we carried out the plans. It was dark and stormy and Rod and I were to meet at a certain place, get into Hank's house on pretense of wanting to ask for more of our shares, and then we were to attack him and get the map. I wondered why Hiram wasn't with us, but Rod said he'd meet us at Hank's house.

"I found out since that Rod tried to get Hiram in on the wicked scheme, but Hiram wouldn't come, and threatened to tell Hank. However, it was too late for that. Rod and I went at it alone, but Hank showed fight. I got a bullet in my leg and had to have it taken off. Rod ran and I haven't seen him since. Hiram wasn't in on the mean trick, as I realize now it was, and I was laid up.

"That ended the attempt to get more than our

share away from Hank, and, not only that, but we had forfeited our right to any more of the treasure."

"How was that?" asked Ned.

"Well, we agreed when the first division was made, and Hank had been made banker, so to speak, that if any one of us tried to trick, or over-reach, the other, he would lose his rights to any further share in the remainder of the gold. As we all signed a paper to this effect—signed it in blood, too, for we had our superstitions—as we'd all signed, that was all there was to it. Rod and I were out of it. The rest of the gold went to Hank and Hiram."

"And Mr. Denby is dead," remarked Bob.

"Yes, but he and Hiram remained friends to the last on account of what had happened—Hiram not going into the rotten trick. And in the course of events Hank left his share—and there was more than when he started with it—he left it all to Hiram. Not only that, but he left our two shares also—Rod's and mine—as he had a right to do."

"How do you know all this?" asked Harry.

"I got a letter from a lawyer here in town, telling me about that," said Jolly Bill, now quite serious. "This lawyer—Judge Weston is his name—said Hank had left a will, and some instructions—and the instructions were for this lawyer to write to us after Hank's death, telling how everything went to Hiram, under the rules we had all agreed to.

"So Hiram got the brass bound box, in which Hank kept the map, showing where the treasure is still buried. For you must know, boys, that Hank, like the rest of us, was a bit afraid of banks. He kept most of the money hid and it's hid yet. The map's the only thing to tell where it is. Not even the lawyer knows, he wrote me."

"And did he write the same news to Rodney Marbury?" asked Bob.

"I suppose he did—that was the agreement—the first one to die was to let the others know, writing to the last address he had. So I s'pose Rod knows how his trick didn't do him any good, nor me neither. We were both bilked out of our shares, but we had a right to be. It served us good and proper.

"However, I made some money in another way—not much—but enough to exist on—and when I heard Hank was dead I came on to see my old messmate Hiram. And I got here just too late."

"Yes," agreed Bob, "some one got the treasure map and they may have the treasure by this time."

"It's likely," agreed Jolly Bill with a sigh. "But it can't be helped. But I think I know who robbed Hiram."

"I guess we can make a pretty good stab at it," said Bob. "If what Mr. Beegle thinks is true, it must be this same Rodney Marbury."

"Correct, my lad. And you said he waylaid him

on the way home from the lawyer's office?" asked Bill.

"That's what he thinks," stated Bob. "I found him unconscious beside the road, but he then had the box."

"Which he hasn't now," added Bill. "Well, I s'pose it's all up. Rod will get the treasure after all."

"Maybe not," spoke Bob quietly.

"What do you mean?" asked the wooden-legged man.

"I mean that he'll be trailed," said the lad. "The police of this and other towns will get after him."

"A lot of good that will do!" laughed Harry. "The police—whoop!"

"Well, then, I'll take a hand myself!" declared Bob.

"Now you're talking!" cried Ned. "Detective Bob Dexter on the trail! Hurray!"

"Cut it out!" said his chum in a low voice. "There's that hand-organ grinder again!"

And, as he spoke the man with the monkey and wheezy music box came tramping along the road.

CHAPTER X

SAILOR'S KNOTS

JUST why Bob Dexter didn't want Ned to wax enthusiastic over the fact that Bob intended taking the trail after the thief who had robbed Hiram Beegle wasn't quite clear. Perhaps it was Bob's modesty over ever being praised for his detective work. Perhaps it was just natural caution in the presence of the strange Italian—for certainly he seemed of that nationality.

However it was, Ned desisted from his words of praise, and a silence fell over the group in the auto as the man with the organ and monkey shuffled along.

He had cast a quick glance at all in the machine, his glance lasting longest, perhaps, on the jolly face of Bill Hickey, for on that odd character's shining countenance a smile was again visible. Bill seemed to have recovered his spirits after telling his story.

The organ man appeared inclined to stop and grind out a tune, hoping, perhaps, to charm some pennies from the pockets of those in the flivver, either by his music, of which the less said the better, or by the antics of his monkey, which was the usual

small variety, attired in coat, trousers and a cap—a shameful degrading of a decent simian.

But Bob exclaimed:

"You needn't play any music for us—we're going to move along."

"That's right," chimed in Jolly Bill. "I reckon I've spun about all of the yarn you need to hear."

"No music—you no like?" questioned the Italian, with his shock of hair and his curling, matted beard.

"No like," said Ned, with a laugh.

Once more the auto rolled along the quiet country road, leaving the organ grinder and his monkey staring after them.

"Looks like he was going to settle down here permanently," remarked Harry.

"Yes," agreed Bob. "This is the third time we've seen him the same day. They don't often come to Cliffside."

"Well, as I was saying," remarked Ned, "if anybody can locate this Rod Marbury it can be done by our young detective friend Bob Dexter."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Bob with a smile. "But I'd like to have a go at it, if Mr. Beegle will let me."

"Let you?" cried Jolly Bill Hickey, "why he'll be glad to have you get his map back! He wants that treasure—any man would, and he can't tell where old Hank Denby hid it until he looks at the map. Of

course he'll be glad to have you get it back for him."

"I don't know that I can do it—or even find this man he suspects," stated Bob.

"Well, you can have a try at it, anyhow," decided Harry. "And you did pretty well down at Beacon Beach."

"There was a lot of luck in that," admitted Bob.

"Well, maybe luck will break here for you, too," put in Jolly Bill. "I hope so, for Hiram's sake."

"But look here," spoke out Ned. "Mr. Beegle must have opened his brass-bound box and have looked at the map inside between the time he got home with it and the time it was taken from him. And by looking at the map he must know where the stuff is buried."

"That's so," agreed Harry.

"Not so fast!" exclaimed Jolly Bill. "It isn't so easy to look at a map and then find the place it refers to. We found that out when we went to the South Sea island. You've got to have the map right with you, and work your course along fathom by fathom. Hiram would need the map to find where Hank had hid anything. Hank wouldn't hide it in any easy place, or a place you could find by one look at the map. And Hiram didn't have much time to study it.

"No, what I think, is that Rod heard, through the letter he got from Judge Weston, that everything

had gone to Hiram. This made him mad and he decided to do things his own way, like he did once before when this happened to me," and Jolly Bill tapped his wooden leg. "So he got the best of Hiram before Hiram had a chance to study the map. Rod has it now and he'll dig up that treasure as soon as he gets the chance."

"Do you think it's buried around here?" asked Ned eagerly.

"It's likely to be somewhere around Cliffside," admitted Bill. "Hank wasn't much of a hand to go far away from home after our South Sea trip."

"Then all we'll have to do is to watch where any stranger begins digging operations," was Ned's opinion. "I say stranger, for we don't any of us know this Rod Marbury."

"I know him—to my sorrow!" remarked Jolly Bill. "But as for watching for a digger—gosh! any number of holes could be sunk, off in the woods—in the mountains—even at Storm Mountain—and no one in the village would ever know it—not even the police."

"I guess that's right," agreed Ned. "We'll have to leave it to Bob Dexter."

"Well, Bob Dexter isn't going to do anything about it right away," declared the young detective himself. "I've got to get back and report to Uncle Joel. I've been away a long time as it is."

"That's right," said his chums.

"Well, I'll see you again some time," remarked Jolly Bill, as they left him at the Mansion House—a hotel hardly living up to its name—but good enough for the purpose. "I'm going to stick around a while and see if I can help Hiram. Of course I feel a bit sore that I didn't get a share in the big part of the treasure, but it served me right for letting Rod lead me astray in attacking Hank. I deserve all I'm getting, and I'm not complaining."

He seemed quite humble and not a bit jolly now.

"But I'll do all I can to help Hiram," he went on, as he stumped into the hotel, attracting many curious glances, for he was as odd a character as had been seen in those parts in many a long day. "And if I can help you solve this mystery, my young detective, call on me," he said to Bob.

"Thanks, I shall," was the answer. "I don't know that I can do anything, but I'm going to try, if my uncle will let me."

All Cliffside was soon buzzing with the news of the attack on the lonely old man, and there were various rumors as to the size of the fortune taken from him. Of course there was some disappointment that there had been no murder—I mean disappointment from a strictly sensational standpoint, for no one wanted to see the harmless old man killed. But, all in all, there was plenty of excitement for a time.

The real story was known only to Bob, his two

chums and Jolly Bill, and the lads had agreed to keep silent about it. Jolly Bill had no inducement to tell something that was not to his credit. And Ned and Harry wanted to give Bob a chance to exercise his detective abilities, in which they hoped to share.

As for Rod Marbury, he would have the greatest incentive in the world to remain in hiding, and Hiram was so ill and hazy as to what had happened that he would not be likely to tell the story of the buried and recovered treasure. Re-buried to be exact, for it had been hidden by Hank Denby and was still hidden, unless Rod Marbury had used the map to get the location of it and had removed it.

"Well, Bob," remarked his uncle at home that evening, when they were talking the matter over, "of course I want you should make your way in life. I did hope you'd sort of succeed to my business, but I can see you're not cut out for a hardware merchant. I don't altogether hold with this detective business, but I like to see a young man go in for what he likes best, other things being equal. Now you're asking me to let you off from your regular work so you can solve this Storm Mountain mystery."

"That's what I'd like, Uncle Joel."

"Well, then, I'll agree to it with this understanding, that you don't run into danger. I'm responsible for you—almost as much as if I was your father."

"You have been a good father to me," said Bob, feelingly.

"I've tried to be," said Mr. Dexter, quietly. "So I want you to take care of yourself."

"I will," promised the lad. "Thanks, Uncle Joel."

"I don't reckon you'll find out much," went on the hardware man. "From what you tell me it's as queer and complicated as some of the moving pictures we've had here in town. But they always work out some way, and maybe this will."

"I'm sure it will," said Bob, who had told his uncle the whole story. "Of course there are some points that seem pretty hazy—especially about this Rod Marbury—how he could be around, attack Hiram on the road and get in his cabin without being seen either time. And that trick of getting the key back in the locked room—that is a puzzler!"

"There must be some secret about the old log cabin," ventured Mr. Dexter.

"A secret! I'll say there is!" declared Bob. "But I'll find it!"

Having arranged with his uncle to get time off from his work in the store, which work he had promised to do since there was no school for a time, Bob began to lay out some plans. Most of all he wanted a talk with Hiram Beegle, to clear up some points.

"I want to know more about this mysterious Rod

Marbury," said the lad to himself. "When Mr. Beegle gets better he can talk more about what happened just before he was stricken."

The next day Bob went to see the log cabin hermit at the home of Tom Shan, but Mr. Beegle was still a bit weak and uncertain in his mind, and the physician forbade any one bothering him with vexing questions.

"Those two chiefs of police have been here," said Tom to Bob, "but they didn't find out much, and I guess they never will."

"Well, I'll be around again to-morrow," said Bob, as he took his leave, followed by a friendly smile from Hiram Beegle who was slowly improving. He had been knocked out by some sort of gas, or else by something given him to drink, the doctor decided. But the effects were passing off.

On his way back from visiting the chief character in this new mystery that had engaged him, Bob took the road to Storm Mountain and passed near the log cabin. It was deserted and locked, for Chief Drayton still had the keys, though he promised to give them to Mr. Beegle as soon as the latter wanted to get back in his home.

"I wish you could talk," murmured Bob to the silent logs. "You'd tell me how that key got inside the locked room. As soon as I can I'm going to have a look at that room more closely, and have a talk with Hiram. He'll know whether there are any

secret sliding panels in the walls, through which the key could have been tossed in as it could have been had there been a transom over the door."

Bob then walked around to the chimney side. He wanted again to look at those marks in the soft ground—the marks that his chum had first taken for the prints of an elephant's foot. They were somewhat less plain now—those queer marks, but Bob could think of nothing more that they looked like than a sack of potatoes set down again and again because of its weight.

"It's a queer case," mused Bob as he turned away from the old log cabin. "A queer case—more so than that of the Golden Eagle or the wreck of the *Sea Hawk*. I don't know how I'm going to make out on it."

As he walked around to the front of the little dwelling, he saw, sitting on the low doorstep, the organ grinder. The Italian had leaned his wheezy instrument up against a tree, and the monkey was swinging from a low branch.

"Nobody home," said Bob, thinking the fellow might have stopped to play, hoping, thereby, to earn some pennies.

"Nobody home," murmured the other.

He held in his hand the long string that was attached to the collar of his monkey, and as Bob looked the fingers of the man began tying into the cord a number of sailors' knots.

Idly, and seemingly unconsciously, the man made a square knot, he loosened that and threw a clove hitch—then a half hitch. Next he made a running bowline, all the while looking at the lad.

"Nobody home," the Italian said, musingly. "Aw right. I go—come, Jacko!"

And jerking on the string, which was a signal for the monkey to perch on top of the organ, the fellow shouldered his instrument and walked off toward the road.

"Sailors' knots!" mused Bob to himself as he stood watching. "Sailors' knots—I wonder——"

But his wondering was interrupted by hearing footsteps at the rear of the log cabin.

CHAPTER XI

NO POTATOES

BOB DEXTER was not at all alarmed by hearing the footsteps of some one in the rear of the log cabin where Hiram Beegle had his home. The young detective knew that it had been, and probably would be, visited by many curiosity seekers, though now that the first wave of excitement was over there was less morbidness about the cabin.

But the lad was somewhat surprised when he met, coming around the corner of the shack, Chief Drayton of the Storm Mountain force—the whole force, one might say, though the chief did swear in constables on the few occasions when they were needed.

"Hello! What are you doing here, young man?" demanded Mr. Drayton in rather a harsh voice. He did not seem to have recognized Bob.

"Oh, just looking around the same as you are," was the lad's easy reply.

"You can't be looking around the same as me!" snapped out the officer.

"Why not?" coolly demanded Bob, thinking the chief was going to question his right to be on the premises.

"Because I'm here in my official capacity as chief

of the Storm Mountain police. I'm here to solve this mystery, and you can't be here on any such errand as that."

"Well, I happen to be," and Bob smiled. "I have permission from Chief Duncan of the Cliffside police to do what I can on this case."

A light seemed to break over Mr. Drayton.

"Oh, now I know who you be!" he said, though not much more genially than at first. "You're that young detective feller that was here the day Hiram was knocked out. Um, what you doin' here?" and there was suspicion in the question.

"Just looking around—that's all—same as you are."

"Um! Find out anything?"

"No, not a thing. It's as deep a mystery as ever. I was wishing I could get inside. I'd like to take a look at the walls of that room again, and see if there was a secret opening in them. There must be, in order for that key to have gotten back inside."

"Um, maybe there is—unless Hiram did all this himself."

"Do you believe that, Chief?"

"Um, I'm not sayin' what I believe. But I know one thing."

"What's that, Chief?" Bob thought it best to give the man his title. It might make him more friendly.

"I know that you aren't going to get inside—not

while I got the keys!" and the self-important individual drew himself up like a turkey gobbler.

"Oh, there's no hurry," said Bob, easily. "Any time will do. I was just wondering—that's all."

"Yes, there's a lot of folks wondering about this case," said the Storm Mountain official. "And they'll wonder a lot more when I arrest the man that robbed Hiram Beegle."

"I thought you said Hiram did it himself—locked himself in the room and then told a story of being held up," said Bob with a sly smile. He was not averse to taking a "fall" out of the conceited chief.

"I never said no such thing, young feller, and you know it!"

"You said Hiram might have done all this himself."

"Well, I may have *said* it, but I didn't *mean* it. And don't you go to takin' me up so short, neither! I'm in charge here and if I don't want to let you snoop around I don't have to."

"No, I suppose you don't," agreed Bob. "But I didn't intend to take you up short. I want to get at the bottom of this mystery as much as you do. I don't believe Hiram Beegle robbed himself. What object would he have?"

"Um! I'm not here to discuss this case with you! I'll solve it in the official way. And I don't need any help from outsiders. I called in Chief Duncan because I thought he'd like to be associated with

me in this, but I really don't need him. I can get along alone, and I'm going to!"

"Suit yourself," replied Bob easily, and he smiled as he moved away. He had left his flivver out in the road, and as he got into it he saw, farther down the highway, the Italian organ grinder trudging along.

"You're a queer character," mused Bob to himself as he started off. "You certainly were tying sailors' knots in that rope. Must have picked it up on your way over from Italy in a ship. If you weren't what you are, I'd say you had been a sailor some day."

Bob had an errand to do for his uncle in a town beyond Storm Mountain, and it was not until late in the evening when he returned. He found Ned and Harry at the house waiting for him.

"Come on to the movies," urged Harry. "You haven't anything to do, have you, except eat?"

"I haven't got to do even that," answered Bob. "I had supper in Yardley. Yes, I'll go to the movies with you."

"Unless you're going to work on your latest case," added Ned with a laugh.

"No, there isn't much I can do until I have a talk with old Hiram," replied Bob. "There are one or two points I want him to help me clear up before I get down to brass tacks. I guess it will

do me good to get a sight of a movie. Is the show any good?"

"It's a sort of a circus yarn," answered Ned. "They show a lot of the acts in the big tent, so Joe Wright was telling me."

"Good! Let's go!"

It was a lively movie and the boys enjoyed every moment of it. There was one act where a performer slid down a slanting wire cable, attached to the highest point of the tent, suspending himself by his teeth on a sort of trolley wheel that spanned the taut wire.

He whizzed down the inclined cable with great speed, landing on a big mattress at the lower end where the wire was fast to a peg in the ground.

"Say, that was nifty!" whispered Ned to Bob. "Wasn't it?"

"What was?" asked Bob, somewhat absently.

"For cats' sakes! Didn't you see that fellow slide down the inclined wire rope?"

"Oh, you mean that?"

"Sure! What else would I mean? Did you see it?"

"No, I didn't take particular notice," replied Bob. "I was thinking of something else."

"Well, for the love of stamps! Say, what did you come for, anyhow, if you aren't enjoying it?" chuckled Harry.

"Oh, I'm enjoying it all right," remarked Bob.

His chums shook their heads knowingly at each other. Well they realized that the detective virus was working in the veins of Bob Dexter.

It was two days after this, during which time Bob and his chums had paid a visit to Jolly Bill at the Mansion House, that something else happened. Jolly Bill had made himself at home in the town's most pretentious hostelry, though that isn't saying much. He was an easy person to make friends, and seemed to be well liked.

"Well, have you located the treasure yet, or that rascal Rod?" he asked Bob.

"No, not yet. I've been waiting to have a talk with Mr. Beegle."

"So have I," said Jolly Bill. "That's why I left my home out west and traveled here. And no sooner do I arrive than I find my old messmate in difficulties. But I reckon he'll soon be better, and then we'll visit and spin many a yarn together. He may be able to give you a clew that will lead to Rod Marbury.

"I'm hoping he will," said Bob. "I expect to see him to-morrow."

"I'll try and stump my way up there," said the wooden-legged man. "It's a fair walk, but——"

"I'll take you," kindly offered Bob.

"Thanks—that's good of you. Let me know when you go."

But Bob wanted a private and lone conversation

with Hiram Beegle before he took the wooden-legged man to Storm Mountain, and so, with that end in view, the young detective decided to anticipate the visit by one day.

"I think he'll be well enough to talk to me now," Bob reasoned.

On his way to the log cabin the lad in his flivver passed a small hotel or boarding house on the outskirts of the town. It was not a very choice or reputable place, and it did not much surprise Bob to see, sunning himself out in front, the bewhiskered Italian organ grinder.

"Business must be pretty good that he can afford to stay there," thought the lad. "Of course the board isn't so very expensive, but I always thought these organ grinders had to sleep under hay stacks and beg their food in order to get along. But there he is!"

The Italian seemed to know Bob, or at least remember him, for he nodded in friendly fashion as the flivver chugged past.

"He's taking a day off from grinding," thought the young sleuth, for he had sight of neither the monkey nor the organ.

Arriving at the house of Tom Shan, Bob was met by the farmer's wife who said:

"He isn't here!"

"Who?" asked the youth.

"Hiram," was the answer. "He's much better now and he's gone back to his cabin."

"That's good!" exclaimed Bob. "I'll go on over there to talk to him. How did he get back? I sort of figured on coming after him."

"Oh, Tom hitched up and took him over this morning. Hiram is much better. He says his head is all clear now."

"Then can he remember what happened—I mean when he was robbed in his strong room?" asked Bob.

"Well, not exactly," answered Mrs. Shan. "But you better talk with him yourself."

"I will," decided Bob, and he drove over to the log cabin.

"Who's there?" demanded a voice inside, when he had knocked at the door—a voice he recognized as that of the old sailor.

"I am—Bob Dexter," was the reply.

There was a moment of silence, and then a movement within—the sound of a chair being pushed back over the floor.

"Oh—all right—I'll let you in," went on Hiram Beegle.

There was the sound of a key being turned in the lock, and a rattle, denoting a chain being slipped from its fastenings.

"He isn't taking any more chances," thought Bob with a smile.

The door was finally opened, and the old man

peered out. That dazed look was gone from his face, but he seemed a trifle weak. As he caught sight of Bob he murmured:

"Oh, the young detective who helped me! I remember. Come in. But is there any one with you?" he asked, suspiciously.

"Not a soul," answered Bob.

"Good! All right, come in."

The place had been straightened out since the night of the robbery, and there were evidences of a woman's hand. So Bob judged Mrs. Shan had been putting the log cabin to rights.

"I thought I'd like to satisfy myself on a few points about this case," began Bob. "Chief Duncan said I might try my hand at solving it."

"Somebody needs to do it," spoke Hiram Beegle. "It's a queer case. If I don't get back that map I'll never know where the treasure is hid, and I'll never get it."

"Did you have a chance to look at the map and find the location before you were robbed?" asked Bob.

"No, I only glanced at the papers in the box Hank Denby left me in his will. The map was quite complicated—it would take a deal of study to puzzle it out. But now it's gone."

"And is all that story true that Jolly Bill told—about treasure on a South Sea island?" asked Bob.

"Well, I don't know what Bill told you," was

the reply. "But there was treasure on an island. It was dug up and we four agreed to share it—that is until Rod and Bill went to the bad when they forfeited their shares. It wasn't so much Bill's fault though—I don't hold it against him. It was that Rod Marbury."

"So I understand," spoke Bob. "We'll pass over that for a while," he said, glad to have, however, this much confirmation of the tale told by the wooden-legged sailor. "What I'd like to find out now, Mr. Beegle, is how that key got inside the room where you were lying unconscious. Are there any secret openings by which the key could have been tossed in—the opening being closed later?"

"No, Bob, not a one. I watched that room built and I know. That's the deepest mystery of all."

"Well, we'll pass that for the time being. But tell me—were you out around your cabin, just before you were attacked, carrying a bag of potatoes which you had to set down every now and then because it was too heavy? Were you?"

"A bag of potatoes? No!" exclaimed Hiram, wonderingly.

"Did anybody bring you a sack of potatoes, or did you sell any one a sack, which they carried away?" went on the lad. "There are marks of a potato sack having been set down in the soft ground near the side of your cabin where the chimney of the

fireplace in your strong room is built. Somebody had a sack of potatoes."

"No potatoes!" cried Mr. Beegle. "I didn't carry any, and no one brought me any. It must be something else, my boy. But no potatoes!"

He looked at the young detective earnestly. Then some sort of doubt, or suspicion seemed to enter his mind, for he said:

"Look here, Bob, my boy! You aren't stringing me, are you?"

"Stringing you, Mr. Beegle? No, of course not! Why do you ask that?"

"Because of this potato business. I thought maybe you were trying to play a joke. Lots of people think they can joke with a sailor."

"No," replied the lad, "I'm in dead seriousness. I want to find out all I can about this matter. If you say there weren't any potatoes that ends my theory in that direction."

"But what could have made those marks if it wasn't a sack of potatoes?" thought Bob in wonderment as he went back over the case.

CHAPTER XII

MONKEY LAND

HIRAM BEEGLE was feeling much better. Several days had passed since the two assaults on him—being knocked down on his way home with the brass-bound box, and the attack in his own cabin. He was almost his own, hearty self again as he sat there looking at Bob, trying to fathom what the young detective was driving at.

"I don't understand this potato business, young man," said the old sailor.

"Neither do I," admitted Bob, "unless you have a pet elephant somewhere around this cabin," and he laughed.

"An elephant! I should say not, though I've seen plenty of 'em, and wild ones, too, in my time. More likely I'd have a monkey."

"A monkey?" questioned the lad.

"Yes, I heard there was one camping on my doorstep while I was sick over at Tom Shan's."

"Oh, the organ grinder's monkey—yes. But he's gone away. He's stopping over in Cliffside—at the Railroad House."

"You don't tell me! What's the idea?"

"Guess he must be making money with his wheezy

music," laughed Bob. "But to get back to this subject, have you any idea what made the funny marks around at the side of your cabin, Mr. Beegle?"

"No, I haven't, but I'll go out with you and take a look at them. And say, I wish you wouldn't call me Mr. Beegle?"

"Isn't that your name?" asked Bob, thinking perhaps the inheritor of some of the old pirate's hidden treasure might be masquerading.

"Yes, it's my name, but all my friends call me Hiram, and since you're one of my friends—I'm sure you must be or you wouldn't go to all this work on my account—why can't you call me Hiram?"

"I will, if you wish it," answered Bob. "But as for work—I don't call this work—I mean trying to solve a mystery."

"You don't? Well, have it your own way. Now let's go out and have a look at those marks. Though I'm afraid there aren't many of them left. We had a shower in the night, and that fellow who calls himself the chief of the Storm Mountain police has been pottering around."

"Was he here to-day?" asked Bob.

"Yes, just before you came. He didn't know anything, though, and never will, in my opinion."

Bob did not subscribe to this, feeling that it was not just exactly ethical, since Mr. Drayton was a sort of fellow practitioner so to speak.

Hiram Beegle was right in his surmise that not

many of the "potato marks," as Bob called them, remained. There had been a little shower over Storm Mountain early that morning, and the raindrops, together with the tramping of feet about the cabin, had obliterated, for a great part, the strange impressions.

But Bob found a place, sheltered by the trunk of the tree which grew close to the cabin, where there was one mark plainly visible.

"And if that isn't the impression of a jute bag, the kind that holds potatoes, I don't know what is," declared the young detective.

Hiram Beegle put on his spectacles and bent over to make a closer inspection. Long and earnestly he gazed at the mark.

"That's been made by a bit of bagging," he declared. "I wouldn't go so far as to say the bag had potatoes in it, though."

"No, it needn't have had potatoes in," agreed Bob. "But it was a bag and it had something heavy in. You could tell that more easily, before, by seeing the depth of the impressions. Chief Drayton would have it that your box was carried off in a sack and it was so heavy that the thief had to set it down every now and then."

"Nonsense!" laughed the old sailor. "That box wasn't at all heavy nor big, but it did contain a treasure. It had a map in that showed where old Hank had buried his share of the gold—his share

and that which would have gone to Jolly Bill and Rod if they had done what was right. It's partly my treasure, too, for I didn't use up my share."

"And haven't you any idea where it is buried, even without reference to the map?" asked the lad.

"Nary an idea," was the answer with a dubious shake of the head. "I don't reckon I'll ever lay my eyes on it now."

"Oh, you may," said Bob, cheerfully. "Of course I'm pretty young at this business, but——"

"I've heard good reports of you," complimented Hiram.

"Thanks. But of course there's lots I've got to learn. But I know enough about cases like this to feel sure that, somewhere or other, the thief has made a slip. He's left some sort of a clew, and if I can get on the trail of it we may catch this Rod Marbury."

"Yes, Rod did it all right," declared Hiram. "He and Jolly Bill were the only ones, except me, that knew of the treasure. Old Hank wrote to each of them, just before he died, telling how he had willed the treasure to me, and had left me the brass box in which the map was always kept.

"Now Jolly Bill appears, fair and square and above board, and he's man enough to say he's sorry for what he did. Well, he may be, for he's out of pocket by it.

"But this scoundrel Rod sneaks into town, way-

lays me to get the box away and when he can't do that, because he's scared off, he comes back to my cabin, drugs me in some way, either by dropping something into my buttermilk, or by throwing a gas bomb into my room, and then he takes the box, after tapping me on the head."

"Do you think that's how it happened?" asked Bob.

"Of course it was! I've told you, but I'll tell you again. I went in my strong room, and I was looking at the brass box and the map, when all of a sudden I felt sort of weak like. The next I knew was when I came to, and found myself lying on the floor, locked in, the big key close to my hand, and my box and map gone."

"And you never saw Rod nor any one else?"

"Nary a soul. It was like a dream."

"But you must have been expecting some sort of attack as this," reasoned Bob, "else why did you build the strong room, with no entrance to it except by the door, and the chimney barred? Why did you do that?"

"I'll tell you why, son," was the answer, "it was because I have always feared this Rod Marbury! I've feared him ever since he and Jolly Bill tried to bilk old Hank—not that Bill started that plan—it was Rod. But I knew from that he was a desperate man, though Jolly Bill got the worst of the deal—he lost a leg and the fortune that had been his, while

Rod only lost the money. But now he'll get it all—that's the way in this world—the wicked sure do flourish like a green bay tree, as the Good Book says, and many's the bay tree that I've sat under, though I never thought, at the time, I'd have this bad luck."

"Maybe it will turn out all right," suggested Bob, hopefully.

"I'm afraid not," was the gloomy answer. "Anyhow, as I was telling you, I built this strong room in my cabin after I heard what Rod had tried to do to Hank. I thought my turn would come some day, and it did—but not as I planned. It was the first time I ever went in my strong room, to do anything, without locking the door behind me. If I had done that Rod couldn't have gotten in. But I figured that after he got fooled on the road he wouldn't try again. But he got in, and of course, after that, it was easy for him to get out, after locking me in."

"But how did he get the key back in?" asked Bob. "That's the secret of this log cabin that I'd like solved."

"I'll never tell you," said old Hiram with a shake of his head. "Any more than I can tell you what made those funny marks, like a sack of potatoes."

"Well, that's what I've got to work on," decided Bob. "I've got to discover the secret of the log cabin, and locate Rod. But you might help in the last."

"How?" asked Hiram.

"By giving me some idea of where he might start to dig for the hidden treasure—telling me the probable location of the place where Hank Denby might have hidden it."

Hiram Beegle shook his head dubiously.

"Might as well try to look for a needle in a hay stack," he said. "Hank was a strange man. He'd pick out a hiding place you nor I would never dream of. He must have taken a leaf out of the book of the old pirate who originally had this money. How he got it—I mean how the pirate came by the wealth—no one knows. Perhaps it's just as well not to inquire. Anyhow the real owners couldn't be found after all these years. And I intended doing good with the money after I got it. I was going to leave most of it to a hospital."

"That would be good," remarked Bob. "So we'll have to try to get it back for you. But can't you give me a clew as to where this Rod might start to look for the wealth? He'll know where it is, having the map, you see."

"Oh, yes, he'll know," agreed Hiram. "But I can't say, for the life of me, where it might be."

"Do you think it would be in Cliffside?"

"Yes, I should say so. Hank never went far from home of late years, and he certainly would keep the treasure near him. He didn't believe in banks, you know."

"So I've heard. Well, we'll see what can be done

about it. There isn't anything more I can find out here, since you say there was no secret opening into the strong room."

"Not an opening, but the chimney."

"And when we dropped the key down the flue it just fell in the ashes," said Bob. "So it couldn't have been that way."

He remained a little longer, talking to Hiram and puzzling over the queer case, and then rode back to town. As he passed the office of Judge Weston, the lad saw, coming from it, the Italian organ grinder.

Surprised at this, Bob stopped his car and looked after the man who had neither his organ nor monkey with him this time. Then, as the Italian passed on down the street, Judge Weston came out.

So excited that he hardly observed the veneration due the old gentleman, Bob exclaimed:

"What was he after?"

He pointed to the retreating Italian.

"Why, he came in to buy monkey land!" answered the judge with a laugh.

CHAPTER XIII

QUEER PLANTING

BOB DEXTER did not know whether to laugh with Judge Weston or to remain serious, for he felt there might be something serious in the visit of the Italian to the lawyer's office. Bob was seeing altogether too much of that Italian organ grinder of late—at least so thought the young detective.

However, as Judge Weston continued to smile, as though amused at something, the lad thought it couldn't be very serious, so he repeated:

"Monkey land?"

"Yes," went on the lawyer. "It seems he is a traveling organ grinder, and——"

"Yes, I know him," interrupted Bob. "I beg your pardon," he hastened to add, as he saw the legal man look at him somewhat strangely. "But I was trying to save your time in explanation."

"You say you know this Italian, Bob—er—let me see, I put his name down somewhere—Pietro Margolis, he calls himself."

"Well, I don't exactly *know* him, Judge Weston, but I've seen him around town a lot. He's staying at the Railroad House. I first saw him at the log cabin of Hiram Beegle, right after the robbery. He

walked down the road playing his wheezy old organ and showing off his monkey's tricks."

"Yes, that's what he came to see me about," said the lawyer. "It was his monkey. It seems the animal must have a certain kind of food, and it doesn't grow in this country. So this Margolis wanted to buy a piece of land and plant the peanuts or whatever it is that monkeys eat. I know he doesn't want to plant peanuts, though I know monkeys eat them, but I use peanuts for an illustration. He told me the name of the nut, or fruit or whatever it was he intended to plant, but I've forgotten."

"And he wants to buy land for that purpose?" exclaimed Bob. "Why, it's too late to plant anything now. It might not be in the tropics, where monkeys come from, but here——"

"Oh, he doesn't intend to start planting until spring," said the lawyer. "He just wants to get the land now."

"But you aren't a real estate agent," said Bob. "Why didn't he go to Mr. Landry for what he wanted?"

"I suppose he came to me because he happened to learn that I controlled the very piece of land he wanted to rent, or buy," said the judge.

"Some of your property?"

"No, Bob. Some that belongs to the estate of old Hank Denby. You see, I'm executor of Hank's will, and there are several pieces of land to dispose of."

"Yes, I heard he left quite a little," admitted Bob. "He was pretty well off, even if he didn't use all the pirate gold he dug up at the South Sea islands."

"Oh, you know that story, do you, Bob?" asked the lawyer in some surprise.

"Yes, Jolly Bill Hickey told me part of it and Hiram Beegle the rest."

"Um! Well, I didn't know it was out, but I wouldn't spread it too widely, if I were you. Folks think Hiram queer enough as it is, without having this added to his reputation. Of course if it's necessary, in order to capture the scoundrel who robbed him, to tell the story, I wouldn't ask you to hold it back."

"I understand," stated Bob. "There doesn't seem to be any need, at present, of broadcasting it. The police don't need to know it in order to catch this Rod Marbury."

Again Judge Weston laughed.

"Offhand, Bob, I should say the kind of police we have around here would need to know a great more than this story in order to capture this fellow Marbury. But that's neither here nor there. Are you working on the case?"

"In a way, yes. Of course I'm not officially connected with it. Uncle Joel wouldn't allow that. But some day I'm going to be a regular detective. However, he said I could do whatever I might think

was right in trying to find out things about this mystery."

"I wish you luck, Bob."

"Thanks. But did you rent or sell this Italian any land for his monkey food?"

"I have, practically, Bob, though the deal isn't closed yet. He was willing to pay a good price for a piece of otherwise waste land on which he could raise these monkey nuts, or whatever they were. He doesn't want to start planting until spring, but he wants to get control of the land now to prepare it, he says."

"Where's the land?" asked Bob. "I didn't know we had any in Cliffside that was suitable for monkey business," and he laughed.

"Why, this Pietro Margolis said he had been looking at land around here, and he found a piece that just suited him. It's that overgrown bramble patch back of the house where Hank Denby lived at the time of his death."

"You mean some of Mr. Denby's land?"

"Yes, Bob. I've practically rented this Italian, for a year, that bramble patch, and I consider, as executor of the estate of the old man, that I got a good price for it. You know it's the duty of an executor, Bob, to increase the estate if possible. And though I don't imagine the nieces and nephews of Hank—for those are all the relatives he left—

I don't imagine they appreciate what I've done, still it was my duty."

"Yes," agreed Bob. "So he left his estate to nieces and nephews, did he? But what about the pirate fortune that went to Hiram Beegle—that is if Hiram ever gets it—what about that? Won't these nieces and nephews want a part of that?"

"It wouldn't do them any good to want it, Bob," stated the lawyer. "You see that gold, or whatever form the wealth was in that was dug up on the island—that fortune was held by Hank in trust, so to speak. At his death it went to the survivors of the original four—or such of them as had played fair and kept the agreement. Hiram Beegle was the only one, so he got all the others' shares."

"That is he has them to get," remarked Bob, somewhat grimly. For the stealing of the brass-bound box, containing the directions for finding the hidden wealth, had effectually blocked Mr. Beegle's chances.

"Yes, it's very much in distant prospect, Bob. But perhaps you'll be able to help the old man."

"Maybe. I don't suppose Hank ever intimated to you where he had buried the stuff?"

"Never a word, Bob. He was as close as an oyster on that point, though he told me everything else about his affairs. He said Hiram would have no trouble locating the gold if he followed directions on the map in the brass-bound box. It was very

peculiar on the part of Hank to bury the fortune this way, instead of keeping it in a bank vault, but it was his business, not mine, and though I did my best to persuade him to use business methods, it was of no use. He clung to his old sailor superstitions."

"Yes," agreed Bob, "and Hiram and Jolly Bill Hickey are much the same. I suppose you know Jolly Bill is staying at the Mansion House?"

"So I heard, yes. Well, I think I'll go up and look over this piece of old Hank's land this monkey merchant wants to rent to raise food for his nimble charge. I want to see that he has no ulterior motive, so to speak."

"What do you mean?" asked Bob, a bit puzzled.

"Well, he may know of some land development out in that neighborhood—something like a railroad going through or a new trolley line. If he had a lease on some property that was needed, he might hold up matters until we paid him a big price."

"Oh, I see," remarked Bob. "These Italians are sharp and tricky when it comes to matters of property, I've heard."

"That's right, Bob. This fellow may be all right, but I owe it to the estate not to take any chances. So I'll take a look over the ground before I sign the lease."

"I'll run you up there, if you're going now," of-

fered Bob. "That is if you don't mind riding in my flivver."

"I've ridden in many a worse car, Bob. And I was on my way to look over old Hank's property. Come on, we'll go together."

Judge Weston had truly spoken of the vacant lot near the Denby house as a "bramble patch." It was just that and nothing more. Nor were there any signs in the neighborhood of any real estate boom. It was far off the line of the railroad, and not near the trolley.

"I guess there's no harm in letting Pietro have this place on a lease," said the judge, when he had gone around the bramble patch. Going over or through it was out of the question.

"It doesn't seem to be good even for monkey food," laughed Bob.

"No, I should say not. But then we don't know what monkeys like. I'll go back and draw up the papers."

Bob drove the lawyer back to his office, and as they parted Mr. Weston said:

"If you get any trace of this Rod Marbury, Bob, or get a line on where Hiram can find the missing map, let me know, will you?"

"I will," promised the lad.

"I feel a friendly interest in Hiram," went on the lawyer, "and I'd like to see him get what's coming to him."

"I'm going to help him all I can," declared the young detective.

It was several days after this, during which time Bob had worked in vain to get a clew to the mysterious happenings at the log cabin on Storm Mountain that, one evening, on his way home in his car, having done an errand for his uncle, he passed the old house where Hank Denby had died.

In the glow of the setting sun Bob saw some one moving about in the field behind the house—the field which Judge Weston had rented to Pietro Margolis as a garden in which to raise monkey food.

"It's the Italian organ grinder himself!" exclaimed Bob as he caught sight of the black-bearded fellow.

Bob stopped his flivver, and the noise of the squeaking brakes caused the Italian to look up. He saw and must have recognized the lad. But if he was at all disturbed at being observed he did not show it. Instead he smiled, showing his white, even teeth.

"Hallo!" greeted Pietro. "Hallo—hallo!" He had a queer pronunciation of it—not unpleasant, though.

"Hello," replied Bob. "You grow monkeys here?" he jokingly asked.

"No—not maka da *monk* grow—maka him *eats* grow."

"You mean peanuts?" asked Bob, though he knew it couldn't be goobers, or ground-nuts, that Pietro

contemplated raising in the bramble patch. The lad was throwing out feelers, so to speak.

"No peanuts!" laughed the Italian. "Look—monkey lika deese!"

He held out in his hand, having taken them from the pocket of his coat—some sort of dried fruit or nuts, Bob couldn't decide which.

"Oh, you're going to plant these, eh, Pietro?"

"Sure—plant for da monk."

"But they won't grow this time of year, Pietro. Cold weather, you know—Jack Frost kill 'em. Look, everything now almost dead," and Bob waved his hand over the sear and yellow weeds in the bramble patch.

"Oh, sure, I know—cold—not plant now—plant by next summer time. Just dig now—maka da holes."

"Holes!" exclaimed Bob.

And then he became aware of some curious digging operations that the Italian had been carrying on. There were a number of deep holes here and there in the bramble patch—holes newly dug.

CHAPTER XIV

A NIGHT PURSUIT

SMILINGLY Pietro Margolis leaned on his spade and regarded Bob Dexter. The Italian had been using a spade to good advantage in the bramble patch of old Hank Denby.

"You plant these monkey nuts very deep, don't you?" asked Bob, calling the objects the Italian had shown him "nuts," though he was not certain on this point.

"Sure—got to be deep," said the organ grinder, though he had temporarily abandoned that occupation it seemed. "No deep—no grow."

He tossed into the last hole he had dug a few of the dried objects from his coat pocket, shoveled in the earth and tramped it down.

Bob Dexter knew, or thought he knew, something of farming.

"You'll never make anything grow planting it as deep as that and then stamping the ground down as hard as a brick!" declared the lad.

"Oh, sure da monkey nuts grow!" declared the Italian with a smile. "Alla same we plant dem lika deese in Italy."

He smiled his white-tooth smile.

"Oh, in Italy," conceded Bob. He couldn't dispute this. He had never been in Italy and knew nothing of these strange fruits or nuts.

"Sure—Italy. Deese grow fine when da warm weather he come back. Put 'em in deep so no freeze."

There might be something in that theory Bob admitted to himself. Idly he watched the Italian dig. He cut aside, with wide sweeps of the sharp spade, the dead and dying weeds and brambles, and when he had a cleared place he began on another hole, not far from where he had dug several others, as evidenced by the mounds of fresh earth.

"How's the monkey?" asked Bob, seeing no object in lingering longer on the scene.

"Jacko—he good—I leave him by friend while I plant hees food for da next year."

"What does he live on while these things are growing—there won't be any until next year," said the young detective.

"I got some I breeng from Italy—'nough, mebby, to last. I dunno! Jacko eat da banana too, mebby."

"Um," mused Bob. "Well, I wish you luck, but I don't think much of your farm," and he laughed as he started away.

"Sure, I have da good luck—t'anks," and the Italian smiled and waved a hand in farewell. Then he resumed his digging.

Bob Dexter was doing some hard thinking as he

drove his little flivver down the road and away from the bramble patch, where he left the Italian digging away at the holes, into which he dropped those queer, dried nuts or fruits. And Bob was still thinking on the many problems caused by the robbery and assault on Hiram Beegle as he went to his uncle's store and reported on the business matter that had taken him out of town.

The young detective was still puzzling away over the many queer angles to the case when he reached home, and in the twilight he rather started nervously as he heard his name called when he was putting the car in the garage.

"Hello, Bob!" some one hailed him.

"Who's that?"

"What's the matter?" laughed the voice of Harry Pierce. "Any one would think I was a detective after you."

"Oh—yes, I was thinking of something else," admitted Bob with a laugh. "Come on in! Seen anything of Ned?"

"I'm here," replied the other chum, as he stepped out of the darkness. "Where you been?"

"Over to the courthouse for Uncle Joel. Anything happened in town while I was away?"

"Nothing much. Say, what you going to do tomorrow?"

"Same answer, Harry—nothing much."

"Then let's go after chestnuts."

"Chestnuts! There aren't any left!" declared Bob. "The blight has killed them all."

"Not all," declared Ned. "I know a grove on Storm Mountain where there are still a few good trees left. I found it by accident this summer. I've been saving it."

"Good enough!" cried Bob. "I'm with you. Chestnuts are great, but I didn't think there were any left. Sure I'll go."

"All right—Harry and I'll stop for you early in the morning. There's likely to be a hard frost tonight and that will open the burrs," spoke Ned.

Bob thought of the frost and the holes the Italian was digging to plant his monkey nuts. But the holes seemed to be below the effect of anything but a hard and deep frost, and that kind didn't come so early in the season.

"I'll be ready," promised the young detective. "Is the chestnut grove anywhere near Hiram Beegle's log cabin?"

"Not so far away—why?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I thought I might want to stop over and see the old man—just to see if there's anything new in the case."

"Sure, we can do that," agreed Ned.

"How you coming on with the case?" Harry wanted to know.

"I'm not coming on at all, fellows. It's at a dead standstill, as far as I'm concerned."

"Oh, well, you'll pop off with something unexpectedly, like you did when you discovered the wireless station that was putting out the lighthouse beacon," said Harry.

"Maybe—I hope so," sighed Bob.

His chums called for him next morning before he had finished his breakfast. But Bob hurried through the meal, found an old sack to hold the chestnuts he hoped to gather, and soon the three chums were chugging in the flivver up the trail of Storm Mountain.

The day was pleasant, with just the tang of winter in the air, for Ned's prediction of a heavy frost had been borne out and there was every prospect of a good fall of the sweet, brown nuts.

"If the squirrels and chipmunks haven't been there ahead of us," remarked Harry as they talked over the possibilities.

"Or that dago's monkey!" added Ned. "Say, what do you know about that fellow, anyhow? He's still hanging around town. Lives at the Railroad House and goes out with his organ every night. Charlie McGill was telling me he takes in a lot of nickels, too, playing down around the post office. His monkey does a lot of tricks."

"So I've heard," admitted Bob. But he did not tell of what he had seen in the bramble patch.

"But I guess he won't be up here with his monkey," stated Ned.

"Do monkeys eat chestnuts?" asked Harry.

"Sure they do!" declared Bob. "Don't you remember the story we used to read in school, of the monkey who hired a cat to pull the roasted chestnuts out of the fire?"

"Oh—that's moving picture stuff!" laughed Ned.

Talking and joking they wended their way up Storm Mountain. They passed the cabin of Hiram Beegle, but saw no signs of life about it, and, as it was rather early, Bob thought it best not to stop then to speak to the old sailor.

"We'll give him a hail on our way back," he decided, the others agreeing to this.

Ned's promise to lead his chums to a grove of chestnut trees not killed by the blight which swept over this country a few years ago, was carried out. And, parking the car in a quiet lane, the boys were soon gathering a goodly supply of the new, brown nuts.

The lads were not alone in their garnering, for the grove was a scene of activity on the part of squirrels and chipmunks who took this opportunity of laying up their winter's store of food. But there were enough chestnuts for all, and having filled the bags they had brought with them, the boys began to think of returning.

The sun was higher and warmer when they passed the log cabin again, and Hiram Beegle was pulling weeds from between his rows of dahlias, for he had

a small but beautiful garden of these large and showy flowers.

"Hello, boys!" greeted the old sailor heartily, for he was by this time fully recovered from the effects of the strange attack made on him at the time of the robbery of the treasure map.

"Hello!" greeted Bob, Ned and Harry.

"Come on in," invited the old man. "I can give you some cookies and milk."

"That sounds good to me!" declared Ned.

His long years of sailor life had fitted Hiram Beegle to keep house by himself, and, not only do that but cook well—an art to which his three visitors soon bore testimony. For not only did he set out a plate of excellent molasses cookies before them, but some sandwiches and pie, all of which he had made himself.

The boys had eaten an early breakfast, and chestnutting, or, indeed, any excursion in the open, creates a good appetite, of which our heroes had no lack. So they did full justice to the little lunch the old seaman prepared for them.

"I don't s'pose you've heard anything about your missing box, or about Rod Marbury, have you?" asked Bob when a lull came in the eating.

"Nary a word. I've kept pretty close to my cabin. I didn't want that scoundrel attacking me again."

"Oh, he won't come around again," said Harry.

"I guess not. He got what he was after," remarked Ned.

"While we're here," proceeded Bob, "I'd like to have another look at this room, Mr. Beegle. It seems as if there must be some way of getting a key in through the wall."

"Well, Bob, look as much as you like, but you won't find even a crack. I took good care of that. The chimney hole is the only opening, and you proved that couldn't have been used."

In spite of the assertion of the old sailor, Bob went carefully over each foot of the partition wall, aided by Ned and Harry. The strong room was built across one end of the log cabin, in the end. The three outer sides were of solid logs, chinked and sealed with real mortar, not mud as is sometimes used. There was no break in this. The chimney was built at the rear, and on the outside. It was made of field stone, both attractive in appearance and strong. There were no chinks or cracks through which the key might have been tossed.

The inside wall was of a double thickness of narrow wooden boards, and Bob thought there might be some secret panel in this, as there was a concealed slide hiding the niche where the brass key was kept.

But a careful examination showed no opening, and Hiram declared there was no secret panel.

"What I was thinking of," said Bob, "was that the thief, using a very fine saw, might have sawed

out a piece and have fitted the piece back again, after throwing the key inside."

But the boards were so closely fitted and as solidly nailed to the partition uprights as when Hiram had the work done, some years before.

"Well, I guess I'll have to give it up," remarked Bob in disappointed and baffled tones at the conclusion of the examination. "It's a deep mystery."

The lads thanked the old sailor for his hospitality and rode on back to Cliffside, bearing with them a goodly supply of chestnuts which they divided among their friends.

It was after supper that evening when Bob was settling down to read a book that the telephone in his uncle's house rang a summons. Mr. Dexter answered it and, after listening a moment, said:

"It's you they want, Bob. Chief of Police Duncan!"

"The chief!" exclaimed the lad, his heart suddenly beating fast. "I wonder if he's found out anything?"

He greeted the officer.

"Say, Bob," came the eager voice, "I think we're on the trail of that fellow who robbed Hiram!"

"You mean Rod Marbury?"

"Yes. I just got a tip that there's a strange sailor over in Cardiff, spending money freely. I'm going over and have a look at him. Would you like to

come along? You heard Hiram describe this chap —you might know him. Want to come?"

"Sure I do! Wait a minute!"

Bob quickly explained to his uncle the nature of the summons.

"You mean chase off in the night after this suspect?" asked Mr. Dexter, not at all pleased.

"Yes. The chief wants to catch him. May I go?"

"Oh, I suppose so, Bob. But be careful!" The consent was reluctantly given.

"I will, Uncle Joel."

"Oh, Bob, I hate to have you go out at night on this detective business!" objected Aunt Hannah.

"You've got to do night work if you're going to be a detective," said Bob cheerfully. He was even elated at the prospect before him of a night pursuit.

Quickly he made ready and soon he was chugging in his flivver down to police headquarters.

CHAPTER XV

A SINGER IN THE DARK

"THIS tip just came in," explained Chief Duncan when Bob had joined him, a little excited by the news and by his quick trip from home. "I thought I'd rather have you with me chasing it down, than to take Caleb or even Sam Drayton."

"Glad you thought of me," murmured Bob. Caleb Tarton was the chief constable of Cliffside, while Mr. Drayton, of course, was the chief of Storm Mountain.

"Yes," went on Mr. Duncan as he got into Bob's car, for it had been decided to use that. "Of course this may be only a wild goose chase, but often you can catch chickens when you're after geese. And, speaking of chickens, that's the sort of case Caleb is on now. That's another reason I couldn't bring him."

"A chicken case?" murmured Bob.

"Yes, seems that Tume Mellick has been missing a lot of his fowls lately, and he asked us to investigate. So I sent Caleb over."

"Hope he finds the thief," said Bob.

"Yes. Well, he'll get a chicken supper out of it, anyhow. Tume always serves chicken to his com-

pany. But now about this case, Bob. Do you think you would know this fellow Rod Marbury if you were to see him?"

"It's hard to say. I've never laid eyes on him, as far as I know. All I have to go by is the description Hiram gives."

"Yes, that's all I have. I wrote it down but I remember it. A short, stout fellow, with dark hair and a long scar on one cheek that he got in a fight."

"That's the description I remember," stated Bob. "But of course if this fellow didn't want to be discovered he could disguise himself."

"Oh, sure," agreed the Cliffside chief. "But they can't hide all the marks. And when you take into consideration the fact that this suspect is a sailor, and bound to act like one, that may give him away."

"There's something in that," admitted the lad. "How did you hear about him?"

"Oh, Hank Miller just got back from Cardiff—went over to sell a load of apples to the cider mill, and I've got my suspicions of that cider mill; by the way, I think they make a whole lot stronger cider than the law allows. But that's for the Cardiff police to look after—'tisn't in my territory. Anyhow, Hank was telling me about a fellow he saw in town, spending money pretty freely, and boasting that he could get a lot more when that was gone. He acted like a sailor, so Hank said, and right away it occurred to me it might be this Rod."

"Yes, it might be," assented Bob. "But it doesn't seem likely, that if this is Rod Marbury, he'd stay around here and spend the money so close to the place where he robbed Hiram Beegle."

"You can't always tell by that," declared the chief wisely. "I've known many a criminal to keep out of the hands of the detectives a long time just by staying right near the spot where the crime was committed. He figured out they'd never look for him there, and they didn't. They went to all sorts of other places and never thought of looking or inquiring near home."

"Yes, I've heard of such cases," admitted Bob. "I suppose it would be a good plan for a robber to live next door to the place he robbed—or very near it—for no one would think he had the nerve to do that."

"There's a whole lot to that!" declared the chief.

It was a dark night, and a storm was coming up, but this did not daunt the old chief nor the young detective. They made as good time as was possible to Cardiff and then there confronted them the problem of finding the suspect.

Hank Miller had said the fellow whom he supposed might be Rod Marbury had been seen in many places in Cardiff, spending his money freely and foolishly. Of course the Cardiff police might have knowledge of such an individual. He could hardly escape notice. But neither Bob nor Chief Duncan wanted to disclose their hand in this mat-

ter. That is they wanted to make the capture alone, if capture there was to be made.

"I tell you what we can do," said the chief, as they passed slowly into the town. "We can park the car and shift about a bit on foot. We'll learn more that way. And we can drop into some of these pool parlors where Hank said he saw this fellow."

"Yes, we can do that," agreed Bob.

It was not a very pleasant way to spend an evening, particularly as it was now beginning to drizzle, and was cold, too. But Bob and the chief grimly resolved to go through with it.

"I don't much care for any of the Cardiff police to see me," remarked Mr. Duncan as Bob parked the flivver. "Not that they're any great shakes at picking out folks, but one of them might spot me and it would make talk. So I'll just pull my hat down over my eyes and turn up my coat collar—the rain will be a good excuse, anyhow."

"Good idea," declared Bob, and a little later hardly any of their friends would have recognized the two had they seen them slouching through the streets of Cardiff—the place was rather more of a city than was Cliffside.

Chief Duncan knew the less inviting parts of Cardiff—the haunts which would, most likely, prove attractive to those who liked their pleasures strong, or who had reason to keep out of the ken of the police. So it was to not very respectable pool rooms,

and cigar stores that Bob was led. However, he steeled himself against the sights he saw and went through with it.

All sorts and conditions of men were met with—young men, old men and middle-aged men—far too many young men, be it said, who seemed to have nothing better to do this evening than to hang around a pool table, a flopping cigarette dangling from their lips as they squinted down the length of a cue.

The places were blue with smoke—vile tobacco it was, too—but those moving about in the blue, acrid haze seemed to like it. However, it wasn't very good for complexions. Most of the faces were a pasty white in hue.

There were many men, it seemed, who might be wanted on one criminal charge or other, but not one of them seemed to be a free spender. In fact, few of those in the pool rooms and cigar stores appeared to have any more money than they actually needed. They were a poor lot.

"Tin horn sports and cheap skate gamblers," was the way Chief Duncan characterized them, and Bob agreed.

In some places there were dance halls attached to the pool rooms, and these were the worst of all, for women and girls were there who might have done better to have remained away.

The blare of horrible "jazz" shot out of many an open door, and in their quest Bob and the chief en-

tered. The air in some of the dance places was almost as blue with smoke as in the pool "parlors," but the women and girls—nearly all the latter with bobbed hair—did not seem to mind. In fact, some of the girls were leeringly puffing on cigarettes.

"Not very nice places, eh, Bob?" asked the chief as they left one, filling their lungs with the clean air outside—air filled with rain and frost, but clean—just clean!

"They're rotten!" declared Bob Dexter.

"Well, there aren't many more," said Mr. Duncan. "Are you game?"

"Oh, sure! We'll go through with it. But the sailor doesn't seem to be on hand."

"We may locate him yet. These fellows drift from one night haunt to another. We may go back to the first place and pick him up."

The rain was now falling smartly, but our seekers did not turn back. They kept on with the quest.

"There's one place down this street I'd like to look into," murmured Mr. Duncan.

He turned down what was more of an alley than a street. Here and there a dim gas lamp flickered, adding to rather than relieving the blackness. Halfway down there was a blurr of brightness, showing where the light streamed from the doors of another pool place.

"We'll take a look in there," said the chief.

They made their way down the alley, splashing

in puddles, tramping in the mud and getting more and more wet and miserable every moment.

Suddenly, out of the shadow of some ramshackle building, or perhaps from some hole in the ground, there lurched a swaying figure. And the figure was that of a man who raised his cracked voice in what he doubtless intended for a melody and howled, rather than sang:

"Then spend yer money free,
An' come along o' me,
An' I'll show yer where th' elephant is hidin'!"

The chief caught Bob by the arm, halting him.
"Maybe that's Rod!" he whispered.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WORM DIGGER

SOMEHOW Bob Dexter thought that the game wasn't going to fall into their hands as easily as all that. It would be too good to be true. Of course they had trailed after the suspect through a long, dreary evening, and at much personal discomfort. But here, in front of them, it being only necessary for the chief to step forward and arrest him, was the man answering the description of the free spender.

He had betrayed himself, and yet—Bob could not credit their good luck.

"Never say die, boys! Set 'em up in th' other alley! I got money to spend an' I'm spendin' it! Whoop-la!"

It was a characteristic attitude of one in his condition.

"We won't have any trouble with him, Bob," whispered the chief. "He'll come along with us for the asking."

"Unless some of his friends, or would-be friends object," remarked Bob. For, as he spoke, the doors of several dark hovel-like buildings opened, letting out dim shafts of light. And in this illumination

stood half-revealed, sinister figures—men and women, too, who were on the lookout for just such a gay and reckless spender as this foolish fellow proclaimed himself to be.

"Oh, I'll handle them all right," said the chief.

"You've got to be quick then," remarked the young detective. "There goes some one after him now."

A moment later there darted from one of the evil buildings, a slouching figure of a man. The shaft of light from the open door put him in dark relief. He ran to the swaying, staggering figure of the singer, who was now mumbling to himself, clapped it jovially on the back and cried:

"Come on, Jack! We've been looking for you! Everything is all ready! Right in here, Jack! Everything's lovely!"

He swung the victim around, and the latter, taken by surprise, followed for a few steps. Then, as Bob and the chief watched, the singer unexpectedly stiffened and braced himself back.

"Whoa!" he exclaimed. "Hold on! Where you goin'?"

"For a good time, Jack! To see the elephants you know!"

"Yep—I know! I seen elephants before—big ones, too—in India! I'm elephant hunter, I am—but my name ain't Jack."

"Oh, well, Jill then—Jack or Jill, it's all the same to me. I'm a friend of yours."

But a spirit of opposition had been awakened in the victim. It was a small matter—that of a name, but small matters turn the tide in cases like these.

"If you're friend of mine, you oughter know my name," went on the celebrator, swaying and reeling as the other held him up. "You tell me my name an' I'll go with you."

The other laughed and then tried a bluff.

"Sure, I know your name!" he declared. "It's Bill—good old Bill! Now come on!"

He had made a shot in the dark—in the dark in more ways than one. The chances were in his favor. Bill is a fairly common name, and many a "sport" answers to it even though he may be Tom, Dick or Harry. But again the spirit of perverseness took control of the victim.

"No 'tain't!" he cried. "I ain't Bill—never was—never will be. You guessed wrong—you're no friend of mine. Now lemme be! I'm goin' to find elephant. Tom's my name—Tom Black, an' I'm proud of it. Now lemme go!"

He shook off the hold of the other, and the man who had slipped out of the den of thieves stood irresolute for a moment. He was taken aback, but did not want to use too much force in getting his victim within his clutches. He must try another game, and still be gentle about it.

But at the mention of the name Tom Black the chief nudged Bob.

"Guess we're on the wrong lay," he said.

"Do you think he'd give his right name?" asked the lad.

"They generally do—in his condition. Of course he may be going under two names, but I don't believe this is Rod Marbury."

Bob had begun to think so from the moment he had seen how easy it was—that is comparatively easy—to pick up the trail of the suspect.

"If we could get a look at him," the young detective suggested.

"That's what we've got to do, Bob. Come on. It's getting lighter now. We'll catch him in front of one of these doorways."

It was getting lighter, but not because the blackness of the night was passing, nor because the blessed sun was rising, nor because the rain was ceasing—for none of these things were happening. It was still night and the rain was coming down harder than ever.

But down the lane of the sordid street more doors were opening, and from each one streaked a shaft of light. In some mysterious way, like the smoke signal of the Indians, it was being telegraphed through the district of crime that "pickings" were on the way. The aforesaid "pickings" being an intoxicated man with money in his pockets. This was the sort of victim much sought after by the dwellers of the

"Barbary Coast," as the district was called by the police.

The man who had accosted the singer, if such he might be called, had slipped away in the darkness, either to get help, to concoct some new scheme, or to await a more propitious occasion.

But, meanwhile, other would-be despoilers were on the scene. And Chief Duncan proposed to take advantage of the light they were letting into the darkness.

"Come on, Bob," he whispered. "He's in a good position now to get a look at."

The man was again singing, or, rather, groaning about his desire to see where the elephant was hiding. And just as he came in focus of one of the better lighted doorways, the young detective and the officer walked alongside of him. As they did so another man darted from the lighted doorway as if to swoop down like some foul bird of prey.

But, seeing the other two figures—and a glance told him they were not of his ilk—he drew back.

It needed but a glance on the part of Bob and the chief to let them see that this man bore no resemblance whatever to the description they had of Rod Marbury. Neither in build, stature nor appearance did he bear any likeness to the suspected sailor.

"No go, Bob," spoke the chief, turning to flash a look full in the face of the staggering man.

"No," was the answer.

"Who says I shan't go?" angrily demanded the man, mistaking the words spoken. "I'm my own boss. I'll go see elephant if I like!"

"I'm not going to stop you," declared the chief. "You're your own boss, though I wouldn't give much for your pocketbook when you come off the Barbary Coast. Go ahead, I don't want you."

"Don't you think it would be a good plan," suggested Bob, "to get him away from this neighborhood? He's sure to be robbed and maybe injured if he stays here."

"You never said a truer thing in all your life, Bob Dexter," spoke the chief. "But trying to get him to come with us wouldn't do a bit of good. We couldn't keep him with us all night, or until he is in better senses. He'd only be an elephant on our hands. And if we took him away from here he'd wander back again in a few hours. The night is young yet."

"Then what can we do? I hate to see him get plucked."

"So do I, and I have a plan. I don't want the Cardiff police to know I'm in town. But I can telephone to headquarters, in the guise of a citizen who has seen a man with money in this dangerous neighborhood, and they'll send the wagon and a couple of men in uniform. Brass buttons are the only thing that will impress this fellow.

"Of course they can't arrest him, for he hasn't

done anything more than get himself into a foolish and miserable state. But they can detain him until morning, when he'll be sober. That's often done, and that will save his money for him. Come on, we'll slip out of here and find a telephone."

"Yes, but while we're gone some one of these sharks will pull him into their holes."

"He'll be easy to find, Bob. Every resident here wants a chance at picking his bones, and for the one who gets him there'll be a dozen envious ones ready to squeal. A stool-pigeon will tip the police off as to what den this fellow was hauled into, and they can take him out. There's time enough—he won't give up his roll easily. It takes a little time to work the game and before it's played out I'll have the officers here."

Content with this Bob followed the chief out of the vile and evil district. The telephone tip was gladly received, for the police of Cardiff were not anxious to have it broadcasted that irresponsible and foolish strangers were robbed, even along the Barbary Coast. Word was given to the chief, who, of course, did not reveal his identity, that the matter would be looked after.

Having done their duty, Bob and the chief returned to the district long enough to see the clanging wagon rumble in and take away the "elephant hunter." He had been enticed into one of the dens,

but, as Mr. Duncan had said, some one "squealed," and the police easily located the place.

"Well, I guess this ends it, Bob," remarked the head of the Cliffside police. "It was a wild goose chase."

"I wish it had been a wild duck," murmured Bob.

"Why?"

"Well, a duck's back would have shed water better than mine. I'm soaked."

"So'm I. But it couldn't be helped. You'll have to get used to worse than this, Bob, if you're going to be a detective. And not only one night but many nights in succession."

"Oh, I know that. I'm not kicking. Only I wish we had picked up Rod."

"So do I. But it wasn't to be. It was a good tip, as far as it went. But I guess Rod is safe enough, for a time. But we'll have another shot at finding him."

"Of course," agreed Bob, as they chugged back to Cliffside in the rain and darkness.

It cannot be said that the young detective was very much discouraged or disappointed at the result of this excursion. It had been but a slim chance, at best, but slim chances must be taken when trying to solve mysteries or catch criminals.

As a matter of fact Bob Dexter would have been rather sorry, in a way, had the foolish man turned out to be Rod Marbury. For the credit of the cap-

ture would have gone to Chief Duncan. And Bob wanted to solve the mystery himself.

"And I want to find out the secret of the log cabin," he told himself as he got into bed late that night, or, rather, early the next morning. "I want to find out how the key got back in the room."

For about a week there were no more moves in the case—that is, moves which appeared on the surface. What was going on beneath no one could tell.

Pietro Margolis continued to dig holes and plant his "monkey nuts," as Bob called them. Jolly Bill Hickey continued to reside at the Mansion House, now and then going to Storm Mountain to visit Hiram Beegle. The old sailor was now quite himself again, but he could throw no additional light on the strange robbery.

"I don't know where the treasure is, nor whether Rod is digging it up or not," he said. "I'm fogbound—that's about it—fogbound."

But Bob Dexter was anything except discouraged. He had youth and health, and these are the two best tonics in the world. Of course he would have been glad to come at a quick solution of the mystery.

"Though if I did there wouldn't be much credit in solving it," he told himself more than once. "If it was as easy as all that, Ned or Harry could do as well as I, and I wouldn't like to think that. A

regular detective wouldn't give up now, and I'm not going to!"

Bob squared his shoulders, clenched his hands and walked about with such a defiant air that his chums, more than once, asked him after that why he was carrying a "chip on his shoulder."

It was one day, about two weeks after Bob's night trip to Cardiff that, as he passed the log cabin he saw, in what was the garden during the summer, a figure using a spade.

"I wonder if that dago is planting monkey nuts on Hiram's place?" thought Bob, for the figure, that of a man, had his back turned. "It isn't Hiram. I wonder——"

The man with the spade straightened up. It was Jolly Bill. He saw Bob and waved a hand.

"I'm digging worms!" he called. "Not having much luck though."

"Digging worms?" repeated the young detective in questioning tones. "I wonder what his game is?" he said to himself as he alighted from his flivver.

CHAPTER XVII

BOB GIVES A PARTY

HAD Jolly Bill Hickey announced that he was digging in Hiram's old garden to locate the treasure buried by the dead and gone Hank Denby, the young detective would not have been more surprised than he was when the laughing sailor declared that he was digging worms.

"Worms!" repeated Bob as he made his way toward the gate in the fence. "Worms!" He spoke the last aloud.

"Sure—worms!" declared Jolly Bill. "Guess I've got as much right to dig worms to go fishing with as that dago has to plant monkey nuts!" and he laughed genially.

"Oh—you're going *fishing*!" exclaimed Bob.

"Sure I am—what else would I be digging worms for? Hiram and I are going fishing."

"Oh—of course," murmured Bob.

It was perfectly obvious and natural now. There was good fishing in Lake Netcong or Rockaway river, both near Cliffside. Bob had been to both places, with both good and bad luck at times. And he had fished with worms as well as with hellgramites, and grasshoppers. The lads of Cliffside in-

clined to natural bait rather than spinners, plugs or artificial flies.

"Don't you want to come along?" invited Jolly Bill as Bob stood looking at him turn over the brown earth, scanning each spadeful, meanwhile, for a sight of worms.

"Don't believe I can," answered the lad. "But you won't find any worms here, no matter how long you dig. It isn't the right kind of earth."

"Do you know," said Jolly Bill with a frank and engaging smile, "I am beginning to believe that myself. All I've turned up the last half hour has been one poor, miserable little worm. Must be an orphan, I reckon," and he laughed heartily.

"That's what I been telling him," spoke the voice of Hiram Beegle from the doorway of his log cabin. "You'll never get any bait there, Bill, and you might as well quit. Down back where the stable used to be are worms aplenty."

"Oh, all right," assented the other. "You ought to know the lay of the land better than I do. And I certainly haven't had any luck here. I'll take your advice."

At one time Hiram had kept a horse which hauled a ramshackle wagon that took him to and from Cliffside. But he had sold the animal some years ago, as requiring too much care from an old man.

However, land about a stable, no matter how long the equine dweller has been away, seems to be a

homestead for worms, a fact which Jolly Bill soon demonstrated. From his digging he called:

"I'm getting slathers of 'em now. Get your pole ready, Hiram."

"All right," was the answer.

Bob had been talking to the old man while Jolly Bill had transferred the scene of his digging operations.

"Think you'll get any fish this time of year?" asked the young detective, for it was rather late in the season for the fish to bite well. The finny tribes were "holing up" for the winter, or doing whatever fish do in preparation for snow and ice covering the lake and river.

"Well, no, Bob, I don't expect we'll get many," was the cautious answer. "It was Bill's idea to take me fishing. He proposed it."

Bob had begun to suspect that much.

"And he suggested coming here to dig for worms, didn't he?" asked the lad.

"Why, that's what he did!" exclaimed old Hiram. "How'd you know that, Bob Dexter?"

"Oh, I sort of guessed it, I reckon. Has he been digging long?"

"No, he just started a little while before you came around. But he says he and I will go fishing every day as long as the weather holds good. I'm not much of a hand for fish myself, but I didn't want to refuse Bill."

"He has a jolly way with him," conceded the lad.

The wooden-legged sailor stumped up with a tomato can half filled with worms.

"If we have luck like that at fishing," he remarked as he scraped some mud off his timber-leg on the spade, "we'll be doing well."

"I should say so!" laughed Bob. He had marveled at the skill with which Bill used the wooden leg. It served him at spading almost as well as did the foot and leg of a normal person. Bill stood on his good foot, and putting the end of his wooden stump on the top edge of the spade, where it is made wider to give purchase, he pressed the keen, straight, garden implement down in the soft soil. Then, with a quick motion, the spadeful of earth was turned over, and beaten apart with a quick blow, revealing the crawling worms.

"Then you won't come, Bob?" asked Hiram as he got down his pole from inside the cabin.

"No, thank you—not this time."

"If you're passing back this way, later in the day, stop and we'll give you some fish for your uncle," promised Hiram. "That is if we catch any."

"Oh, we'll catch plenty!" predicted Jolly Bill.

"Thanks," replied Bob. "I'll stop if I pass this way. And now, if you like, I'll run you down to the lake, or river—which are you going to try first?"

"The lake," decided Hiram, as Bill looked to him to answer this question. "And it's right kind of

you, Bob, to do this. I was going to ask Tom Shan to hitch up and ride us down, but your machine'll be a lot quicker."

It was, and when Bob had left the fishermen at the lake, promising, if he had time, to call and take them home, he went on to his uncle's store.

Contrary to expectation, Bob did not find anything to do. Mr. Dexter had wanted him to deliver a special order over in Cardiff, but the man called for it himself, and this gave the lad some free time.

"I think I'll just take a run back to Storm Mountain," mused the young detective. "Hiram won't be back for some time, and I'd like to take a look around the place all by myself. He wouldn't mind if he knew of it, especially when I'm trying to help him. But I'd rather not have to ask him. This gives me a chance to get in alone."

Bob told himself that he would go in the cabin, and he knew he could do this, for he knew the old man never carried with him the key of the outer door, hiding it in a secret place near the doorstep. No one had ever yet found it, and probably Bob was the only one the old man had taken into the secret —and this only after Bob's attention to Hiram after the latter was attacked when carrying home his treasure box.

"I'll just slip in and have a look around," decided the lad. "Maybe I might discover something, though what it can be I don't know. If I could only

figure out a way by which that key was put back in the room, after the door was locked on the outside, I might begin to unravel this mystery."

Bob flivvered up to the log cabin, but he did not alight at once from his little car. He wanted to make sure he wasn't observed. Not that he was doing anything wrong, for it was all along the line of helping Hiram Beegle. But he felt it would be just as well to work unobserved.

Satisfied, after having sat in his auto for five minutes, that no one was in hiding around the log cabin, and making sure that no one was ascending or descending the Storm Mountain road, Bob ran his car in the weed-grown drive and parked it out of casual sight behind what had once been a hen house. But Hiram had given up his chickens as he had his horse. They required too much care, he said.

Bob found the key where Hiram had told him it would be hidden. Then, with a last look up and down the lonely road in front of the log cabin, the lad entered.

Ghostly silent and still it was, his footfalls echoing through the rooms. But Bob was not overly sentimental and he was soon pressing the hidden spring that opened the niche where the key to the strong room was concealed.

It was this room that held the secret, or, rather that had held it, and it was in this room that the young detective was most interested.

"But it seems to hold its secret pretty well," mused the lad as he walked about it, gazing intently on the wooden walls. "There must be some secret opening in them," thought the boy. "Though if there was why doesn't Hiram know it? Or, if he knows it, why does he not admit it? Of course he might have his own reasons for keeping quiet. I wish I could find out!"

Bob looked, he tapped, he hammered he pounded. But all to no purpose. The walls would not give up their secret. He even stuck his head up the chimney flue as far as he could, thereby getting smudges of black on his face, but this effort was no more fruitful than the others.

"The key could come down the chimney, of course," mused Bob, "but it couldn't jump itself out of the ashes into the middle of the room. That's the puzzle."

He had spent more time than he reckoned on in seeking the secret and he was surprised, on looking at his watch, to find how late it was.

"I'd better be going after those two," thought the lad. "They'll have fish enough by this time, if they get any at all."

As Bob was locking the strong room, and preparing to put the key back in its hiding place, he heard something that gave him a start. This was a knock on the front door of the log cabin.

"Gosh! Are they back so soon?" thought the lad.

He did not realize, for the moment, that Hiram would not have knocked at his own door. It must be some one else.

Quickly the lad closed the niche and then, going to the door opened it.

Standing on the threshold was—Pietro Margolis—the Italian music grinder. He had with him neither his monkey nor organ, but on his face there was a look of surprise, and he started back at the sight of Bob Dexter.

"Oh—excuse—please!" he murmured. "I t'ink to find the old man but—you have been cleaning his chimney—maybe?"

At first Bob did not understand. Then as he looked at a daub of soot on his hand, and remembered that there must be some on his face, he realized how natural was the visitor's mistake.

"Hello, Pietro!" greeted the youth. "Mr. Beegle isn't home. I—I've been doing some work for him while he's gone fishing."

"Yes—I see him go—with other man."

"Hum! Maybe that's the reason you came here—because you saw Hiram go away," thought Bob. But he did not say this to the Italian. The latter carried something in a bundle, and, noting that Bob's eyes were directed toward it, the caller, with a white-tooth smile, opened it, revealing some of those same strange nuts, or dried fruits he had been planting in the bramble patch.

"I come see mebby Senor Beegle let me try plant monkey nuts on his land," explained Pietro. "Mebby so they no grow where I put 'em," and he waved his hand in the direction of Cliffside.

"I don't believe anything would grow, the way you planted it," chuckled Bob, remembering the deep holes the Italian had dug.

Pietro looked across the deserted garden. He saw where Jolly Bill had been trying for worms.

"Senor Beegle—he dig holes, too!" exclaimed the caller. He seemed strangely excited. "Mebby so he plant monkey nuts!"

"I don't believe so," stated Bob. "Hiram hasn't any monkey. They have been digging worms," he explained.

"Worms—what for worms?" asked the Italian with a vacant look.

"For fishing. That's where they are, you know —after fish."

"Oh, sure—feesh. Well, mebby so I leave these nuts for Senor Beegle—he plant them and try them —you t'ink?" He held the odd things out to Bob.

"You better come back and explain about them yourself," said Bob. "I'm going after them now. Come back to-morrow."

"Aw-right. I come back!"

The Italian did not seem disappointed. With a patience characteristic of his kind he smiled and

turned away. Bob watched until he saw the organ grinder tramping down the Storm Mountain trail.

Then Bob locked up the log cabin, hid the key where he had found it and took another road back to Cliffside in order to pick up Hiram and Jolly Bill.

They had had good luck fishing, contrary to what Bob had expected and he brought home to his aunt some welcome specimens of the lake. Hiram was left at his cabin and Jolly Bill at the Mansion House.

"Well, I know one thing I'm going to do," said Bob to himself that night in his room. "I'm going to give a party!"

Rather a queer decision you might think, until you knew the reason for it.

There was a room in the headquarters of the Boys' Athletic Club available for gatherings of various sorts. It could be hired for dances and parties by the members or friends of the latter, and often the boys and girls would give little affairs there.

So it did not surprise the chums of Bob Dexter to receive, in the next few days, invitations to a little affair of this sort at the club. On the bottom of some invitations was a line:

"Please bring peanuts."

"What's the idea, Bob?" asked Ned, reading this command. "Aren't you going to feed us?"

"Oh, yes, but the peanuts are for the monkey."

"What monkey?"

"The organ grinder's."

"Is he coming to the party—I mean the dago?"

"Yes, and he's going to bring his organ and monkey."

For a moment Ned stared at his chum, and then, seeing that Bob was serious, Ned broke out into a laugh.

"Oh, ho! I get you!" he chuckled. "It's a dandy idea! Organ music and monkey tricks at your party! Quite a stunt! Good idea!"

"Yes, I think it's quite an idea," said Bob quietly.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN WITH THE HOOK

MANY of Bob Dexter's friends came to his party —in fact nearly all of them were present. Whether it was the admonition to "bring peanuts," or whether Ned Fuller had spread the news that there would be "something doing" at the affair, is not clear. At any rate there was a goodly attendance in the club, where Bob had arranged to entertain his guests.

At first even Ned had been somewhat skeptical about Bob's expressed intention of having "the dago," as they jokingly called the Italian, at the party, with his organ and monkey. And many another lad, to whom Ned imparted the news, smiled knowingly and said:

"Aw, quit your kidding!"

"No, it's a fact—honest!" Ned declared.

And so it proved.

For when the lads and lassies (for the girls were invited) filed into the hall, there, in a place of honor on a platform, was the Italian organist and his pet simian.

"Oh, but we can't dance to that doleful music!" objected Nina Farnsworth as she saw what some of the girls called the "orchestra."

"Don't worry!" laughed Blanche Richmond, "Bob has the jazz band from Cardiff over—talk about music—my feet are aching to begin!"

Bob had his own special object in hiring Pietro to come to the party with Jacko, and making dance music wasn't it. In due time it shall be made known to you.

And, knowing that his young friends liked to dance as much as he did himself, Bob had provided the wherewithal, so to speak. Cardiff—the city where the "elephant man" had engaged the attention of the chief and the young detective that rainy night—Cardiff had an orchestra of young men, noted for their jazz ability—that is if you grant it takes any ability to play jazz music. And this Bob had engaged.

It was the custom for members of the Boys' Athletic Club to take turns giving little affairs, such as dances and parties, so it was not unusual that Bob should do so.

He had been a little diffident about approaching Pietro on the matter, but he had put it in such a way that the Italian had consented after a little thought, and a quick, shrewd look into Bob's face.

"You no maka bad tricks with Jacko?" he asked.

"Of course not!" cried Bob. "You and the monkey will be treated perfectly fair. It's just that I want a little something different at my party—some-

thing to make the boys and girls laugh. The monkey will do that."

"Oh, sure! Jacko—he do many tricks. I show you!"

Bob had called on the queer Italian at the latter's room in the Railroad House. It was a poor enough place to live, but it suited Pietro and others of his kind.

"Sure, the dago's up in his room," Mike Brennan, proprietor of the hotel had said in response to Bob's inquiry. "Go on up—we don't keep elevators or bell boys here!"

So Bob had found the man in his dirty, dingy room, with a heap of rags in the corner for the monkey to sleep on.

"He do many fine tricks," said the Italian, once he understood the object of Bob's call. And he put Jacko through his stunts.

The compensation was agreed upon, Bob giving the man a few dollars more than he had asked, and now it was the night of the party, and Pietro, his organ and Jacko were on hand.

"Oh, isn't he a dear!"

"So cute!"

"Will he bite?"

"I'd love to hold him! May I?"

Thus the girls in raptures over the monkey which sat perched on his master's organ, his wizened face looking pathetically at the gay throng about him.

"Jacko no bite!" murmured Pietro, and he seemed proud of the attention his simian was attracting. "You take him!"

He held the little creature out to Nina, but she drew back with a scream of real or pretended fright.

"I'd love to hold him!" exclaimed Mary Wilson. "Do let me! Come on, you queer little imp!" she murmured.

The monkey whimpered but went to her and put his little hairy paw about the girl's neck.

"Oh, I wouldn't do it for the *world*!" cried Nina.

"He's a dear!" murmured Mary. "His hands are as soft as a baby's."

The monkey readily made friends, and he had a feast of peanuts, for all the boys had done as Bob requested, and there were enough of the goobers to last Jacko a year, it seemed.

"Go on—play something!" cried Bob to his organ orchestra, and the wheezy instrument was set in operation. The boys and girls laughed, particularly when Jacko did some of his tricks, which he performed better to the strains of the organ, it seemed.

Then the jazz took its turn and the party was on.

This isn't a story of Bob Dexter's party, and I don't propose to tell you of the jolly times that went on there—for it was a jolly affair—no doubting that. The jazz was of the jazziest, the monkey

and organ made a great hit, and the refreshments were all that could be desired.

But there was something more than this.

It would not have been exactly correct to say that Bob Dexter gave this party solely for the purpose of advancing him toward a solution of the Storm Mountain mystery—to help him discover the secret of the log cabin. For he had been planning to give a party for six months back—before he ever even dreamed that Hiram Beegle would be robbed of the treasure map.

However, the party now fitted well into Bob's plans, and he took advantage of it to carry out a scheme he wanted to try.

The party was at its merriest, and the boys and girls were gathered in a ring about the organ grinder and his monkey, when Bob touched Ned Fuller on the arm.

Ned, who had been tossing nuts to the monkey, turned about and, in answer to Bob's nod of the head, followed his chum to a quiet corner.

"What's up?" asked Ned. "Want me to help you dish out the ice cream, Bob?"

"No, the steward will do that."

"But something's up—you look serious. Those fellows haven't got old Hiram for good this time; have they?"

"Not that I know of. But I want you to take charge of things here for a little while."

"Take charge of things?"

"Yes. Take my place—act as a sort of deputy host."

"What's the idea?"

"I'm going away for a while."

"You aren't sick, are you?"

"Far from it. But I want to do something. I may as well tell you what it is, and then, if anything happens, you'll know where I am."

"Say, this seems like it was getting serious!" murmured Ned, looking closely at his chum. "You haven't caught that Rod chap, have you?"

"Well, no, not exactly, but I may get on his track, if I have luck. Listen, Ned. I had that Italian come here to-night for a special purpose."

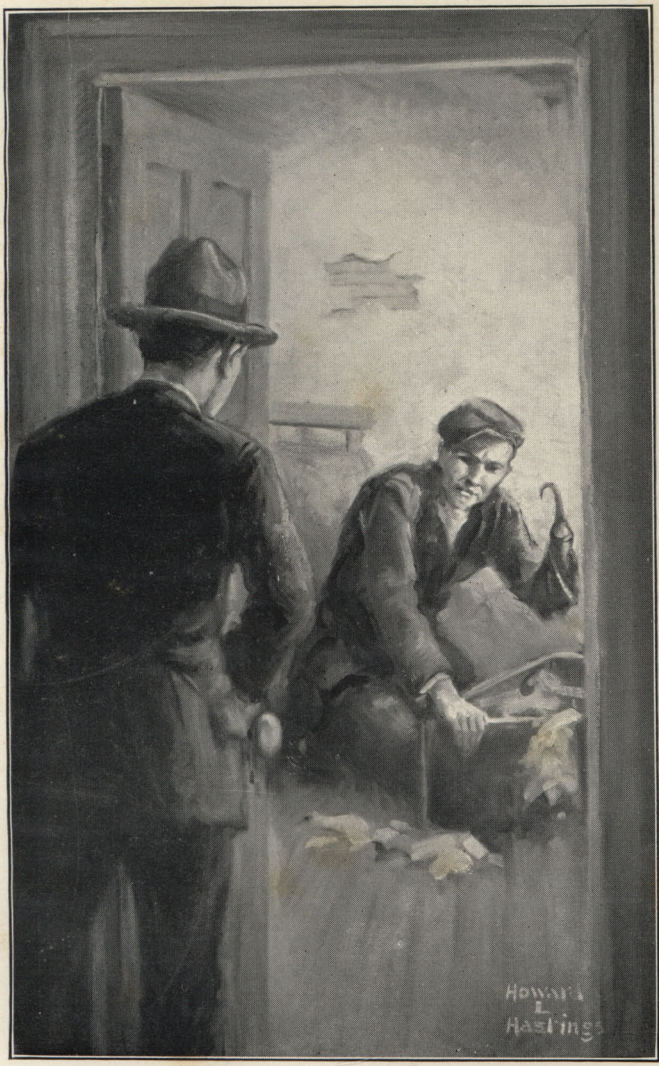
"And a good purpose it was, I'll say if you ask me. He's the hit of the evening, outside of myself!" And Ned puffed out his chest.

"Stow that talk!" chuckled Bob. "But I mean I got the Italian here so he would be out of his room at the Railroad House."

"Ah, noble youth! Providing entertainment—to say nothing of food—for the poor and downtrodden! Atta boy, Bob!"

"Cut it out! I don't mean that way! I asked the dago here so he wouldn't be in his room."

"Naturally if he's here he can't be in his room," bantered Ned. "Two objects can't occupy the same place at the same time. Neither can even an Italian



THE MAN WITH THE HOOK FACED THE YOUNG DETECTIVE.

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organ grinder be in two places at once. Q.E.D. you know, Bob!"

"Oh, will you be serious!"

"Is this serious?" asked Ned.

"It may be—yes. Listen! I'm going out—I'm going to take a run down to the Railroad House and make a search through the room of this fellow. That's why I got him here—so as to give me a clear coast. I can run down in my flivver and be back inside of half an hour. Can you keep things moving that long—until I come back?"

"I'll try, even if I have to stand on my head to amuse 'em!"

"Good boy! But don't do anything rash. Don't raise a rumpus, and if any one asks for me cover my absence. Above all don't let the dago know I've gone to his dump."

"Trust your old college chum for that, Bob. I'm Little Old On The Job for yours truly. Shoot! When you going?"

"Right away. It will soon be time to serve the ice cream and cake, and they can think I'm looking after that. Mum's the word now!"

"Mum is right!" echoed Ned with a wink.

They had conversed rapidly and in low voices in one corner of the room, while nearly all the guests were gathered about the monkey and the Italian.

Seeing that they were likely to be thus amused for some time, Bob slipped out. Ned was on the

alert to forestall possible embarrassing questions.

"I'm going up to the Italian's room a minute," said Bob to the Railroad House proprietor, a little later.

"Help yourself," indifferently replied Mike Brennan. "He's out, though."

"Yes, I know. He's entertaining over at the Boys' Club."

"Oh, sure! Now I remember ye!" cried Mike. "You're th' lad that come and hired him. I s'pose he forgot his music!" and he chuckled. "So ye had t' come for it, did ye? Sure these dagos aren't any good, though Pietro is as decent as any. Go on up wid ye!"

Bob made his way along the dimly lighted hall until he came to the door of the room where the Italian slept. Bob had been in the Railroad House before, once when it was raided by the police. He knew that the locks on the doors were old-fashioned and that a buttonhook would open most of them. An ordinary slender key, with one ward on it, would more than do the trick, and Bob had several keys of the skeleton variety.

He was not surprised to find the door unlocked, when he tried it before using any of the keys he had brought. But if he wasn't surprised at the ease with which he entered, he was surprised at the sight he saw when he pushed back the portal.

For the room was lighted by a dim gas jet, partly

turned down. And in the sickly gleam Bob saw a man in the room—a man stooping over a chest in one corner.

At first Bob believed that Pietro had gotten there ahead of him. But the manifest impossibility of this soon made itself known to him.

The man bending over the Italian's chest straightened up suddenly at the noise of the opening door.

He was a man of rough appearance, and his left hand was missing. In place of it was an iron hook —for all the world like Captain Cuttle.

With a sharp intaking of his breath, the man with the hook faced the young detective. Bob, on his part, could not repress a gasp of surprise.

"Well!" snarled the man at last. "What do you want?"

"Who are you?" demanded the lad.

The two glared at each other in the dim light of the turned-down gas jet.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST CHORD

BOB DEXTER had to do some quick thinking. He had not counted on finding any one in the Italian's room, when he left the party to make a quick survey of the sordid apartment. That is all Bob wanted to do—to look about and either confirm or do away with certain suspicions that had entered his mind.

For he had begun to get suspicious of Pietro, in spite of the ingenuous ways of the smiling Italian, and the suspicions began when the man hired the bramble patch from Judge Weston, with the avowed purpose of planting food for the monkey.

Now that he had come, and found a stranger in the room, and a sinister stranger, with his ugly iron hook in place of a hand and arm—Bob hardly knew what to do or say. He could not make the inspection he wished with this suspicious man present.

And the man with the hook was not only suspicious in himself, but he regarded Bob with suspicion. The lad knew that at once—it was evident not only in his manner but in his look.

Quickly Bob's eyes roved about the room, seeking that on which he could either build further

suspicions, or begin to manufacture new ones. However, what he wanted could not be found by a casual inspection.

What Bob was after was something to connect this man with the sea. Since the time he had seen him idly plaiting sailors' knots in the monkey's cord, the lad had had an idea, in the back of his brain, that the fellow at one time had been a hand before the mast. But that one little slip, if such it was —the idle tying of the odd knots—was the only evidence, so far, that Bob had. He wanted more.

Hence, when he had decided to give his party, and had thought of hiring Pietro, the idea had occurred to him that he could easily slip away for a half hour or so and look through the man's room. Some of the many objects, associated with sailors from time immemorial, would turn the trick and prove that Pietro was not exactly what he pretended to be—a traveling maker of music.

Whence had come this man with the iron hook strapped fast to his arm? He might have stepped directly from the pages of "Dombey and Son." Who was he?

That is what Bob wanted to know.

For perhaps half a minute—and that is a long time when under such stress as were the two—for perhaps half a minute they remained staring at each other—Bob tense and ready for anything

that might happen—the man with the hook ugly and suspicious.

Then, at last, the man seemed to give way to the lad. At least he did to this extent that the angry look faded from his face, and he laughed —albeit uneasily.

"Guess you got in the wrong room, didn't you, lad?" asked the man. "You don't belong here!"

Bob resolved to chance all on a bold throw. He felt pretty certain that Pietro had not taken in a partner. The man did not seem to be an Italian—far from it. And neither Pietro nor the landlord had said anything about a visitor.

Yet here was this man with the hook making himself very much at home in Pietro's place. So Bob resolved on a bit of bluff.

"Aren't you in the wrong room?" came the demand again.

"No more than you are!" countered Bob shortly. "Who are you, and what are you doing in Margolis' place?"

The shot went home.

"Oh, you know him, do you?" asked the man.

"Of course I do!" and Bob followed up the advantage he thought he had gained. "I hired him to play at a party for me to-night."

Bob would have been stuck there but for something that came into his mind. How could he explain his presence there in the absence of the room's

rightful inmate, when he had admitted that Pietro was at the party?

The lad, somehow, remembered that hand organs are operated by a round piece of brass, called a "barrel," and that on this barrel are points of steel, like tiny pins. As the barrel revolves, to the turning of the crank, which operates a worm gear, these points open valves, allowing air to pass over the brass reed-tongues, thus producing "music."

Each barrel has on it a certain number of steel points, set in such a way that they play a set number of tunes, no more. To enable a hand organ, or a street piano, to play other melodies it is necessary to insert another barrel, with different pins on.

Why would not his party guests become tired of a repetition of a set number of tunes? Wouldn't they demand others? And to get them it would be necessary to insert a new barrel in the organ, even as a new roll is put in a player piano.

"I have it!" mused Bob to himself. "I came here to get another barrel so Pietro could play other tunes. That will do the trick!"

So he spoke up and said:

"Have you seen anything of the other barrel?"

He was careful not to say that he had come for it, for that was not his original object.

"What barrel?" asked the man.

"To go in the organ—to play different tunes," the lad explained.

"Hu! I don't know anything about tunes!" growled the man with the hook. "If Pietro sent you for it—all right. Take it if you can find it. But I didn't come here for that. What time's he coming back from this party of yours?"

"Oh, not for a long while yet. It's only just started."

"Um! Well, I'd like to see him. I got particular business with him. He doesn't know I'm here, but I am!"

The man flung himself into a chair which creaked under his weight.

"Look for the barrel—or whatever it is if you like," he growled.

But now Bob had lost all desire to explore the dirty room and its almost as dirty contents. Suddenly another idea had come into his mind.

This man—the stranger with the hook—had claimed to be a friend to the Italian. Otherwise he would not have been allowed to enter his room in the absence of Pietro—as was evident he had done. Though for that matter Mike Brennan did not operate his Railroad House with any real regard for his guests. Those with valuable possessions did not put up at his hotel.

But this man's air was anything but friendly. Somehow Bob got the impression that the visit was distinctly unfriendly. The man with the hook seemed angry. It was evident in his words and manner.

"No, I won't disturb things," said Bob, as he prepared to leave. "I'll send Pietro for it himself. He'll know just where it is. I'll go back and send him."

"And tell him to hustle back here!" growled the other. "I've waited long enough—I'm getting tired. Tell him Jake Dauber is waiting for him."

"Jake Dauber!" repeated Bob.

"That's the name—yes—want me to write it out for you?" there was anger and impatience in the voice.

"Oh, I think I can remember," said Bob, vainly trying to piece together broken bits of the puzzle that was in his mind. "I'll tell him."

He did not linger longer. There was no use. He could not have done what he came for. But perhaps now there would be no need. The man with the hook presented a new complication in the Storm Mountain mystery.

"I'll tell him—good-night—Mr. Dauber," murmured Bob as he stepped out into the dim hall.

"Um!" was all the answer he received. Though the man with the hook shouted after him: "Tell him to git a move on."

At first Bob had it in mind to disobey the injunction he had received. He wasn't going to deliver the message to the Italian. His chief objection to this was that to do so he would have to admit having been in the room of Pietro.

"But he'll know it anyhow," decided Bob. "I'll tell him, after all. Or, rather I'll give him the message. Then later, if Pietro wants to know why I went to his room I can tell him I thought maybe he had another barrel to his organ. And I really wish he had—his tunes are getting monotonous."

This was a way out—a fair and square way.

"I'll tell him about the man with the hook!" decided Bob.

And when he gave the message, such a look of terror and despair came over the face of the Italian that Bob felt sorry for him. The jazz orchestra was playing its best or its worst, however you look at it, and the Italian had nothing to do. The guests were dancing and had partaken of some of the refreshments. No one seemed to have noticed the short absence of the young detective.

"You—say—man—with hook arm?" faltered the Italian.

"Yes—at your hotel—in your room. He wants you."

"Wants me?"

"Yes—in a hurry."

"Oh—I—I go—but I promise you, Senor Dexter—I say I come to make monkey do tricks at your party—I play——"

"You've played enough—you've earned your money," said Bob with a smile. "Better go back.

That man with the hook—he's anxious to see you. Who is he? He says his name is Dauber."

"He is—one devil!" hissed the Italian, as, shouldering his instrument, and calling to his monkey, he hurried out.

"There's going to be trouble there, if I'm any good at guessing," declared Bob to himself. "And after this party I'm going back to the Railroad House and see what has happened."

It was early morning when the last guest had gone, and Bob jumped into his flivver, making his way to the Railroad House. Mike Brennan boasted that he never closed, that he had "lost the key," and couldn't. Consequently the place was lighted even at the hour of two in the morning.

"What, you back again?" growled Mike, who acted as his own night clerk.

"Yes. Is that Italian here?"

"Who, Pietro and his monkey?"

"Yes."

"No."

"You mean!" exclaimed Bob. "You mean he——"

"He's gone—yes! Paid what he owed and skipped out—he and that feller with the iron hook that came earlier in the evening. And say, there was something queer between them two."

"Something queer?" questioned Bob.

"Sure! That dago was in a sweat of fear of

the man with the hook. Why, even the monkey seemed to be scairt! I never see anything like it. Honest I didn't."

"Maybe they had some sort of a quarrel," suggested Bob.

"Maybe. Though I didn't hear anything of that. I did hear something, though, that made me think there was a phoney game in it."

"What did you hear?" asked Bob.

"Why all along this dago has been calling himself Pietro—Pietro Margolis, you know."

"Yes," agreed the lad.

"Well, when he was going out—after paying what he owed me—and I must say he was fair and square—when he was going out he gave one last squeak to his organ—queer sort of a squeak, too."

"Yes," said Bob. "A sort of last chord, perhaps."

"Maybe; but then I don't know nothing about music. But what I started to say was this fellow's name isn't Pietro at all!"

"It isn't?"

"No. This man with the hook called him Rodney!"

You could almost have knocked Bob Dexter over with a feather then.

CHAPTER XX

NEW SUSPICIONS

REALIZING that it would not be wise to show too much emotion and surprise in front of Mike Brennan, the young detective controlled his astonishment as much as possible, though it was difficult.

"Oh, well," he murmured, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, "maybe Rodney was Pietro's middle name."

"Maybe, but I don't believe so," asserted the proprietor of the Railroad House. "Rodney isn't a dago's name at all, and, what's more, I don't believe this chap is an Italian at all."

"You don't?" asked Bob, and then he elaborately yawned and stretched, as though wearied with his night of pleasure, and as though what he was hearing didn't at all matter to him. But it did—very much.

"No, I don't!" declared Mike Brennan.

"Well, that isn't going to make me lose any more sleep," declared Bob, again yawning. "I just came to tell him something, but if he's gone some other time will do." He gave the impression of elaborate indifference, so much so as even to deceive Mr. Brennan.

"There won't be any other time," declared the proprietor. "This fellow—Rodney or Pietro or whatever his name is has gone for good."

"Good riddance, I say," exclaimed Bob, though he didn't really mean it. "He wasn't any credit to the town, playing that wheezy music and digging holes in a bramble patch to plant monkey nuts—crazy stuff I call it. But what makes you think he wasn't an Italian, Mr. Brennan? He looked like one and talked like one, and nobody but a dago would go around with a hand organ and a monkey."

"I don't know about that, but when this man with the iron hook called the other 'Rodney,' your hand organ man turned around and in as good United States' talk as I ever heard he said: 'Shut up, you big chump. Do you want to spill the beans?' And that's no kind of talk for an Italian who pretends he can't use English."

"No, maybe not," laughed Bob, though within he was far from laughing. He saw big events just ahead of him—he saw a glimmering of daylight where there had been darkness, in the queer mystery of Storm Mountain. "Well, was that all?"

"Yes, except that they went off together in a sort of huff, mainly, I think, because this man with the hook called this Pietro by a name he hasn't been using."

"Oh, that man with the hook was a quarrelsome

sort of chap," observed Bob, easily. "He had a perpetual grouch on, I'd say. It isn't going to worry me. I'm glad my party's over, or those two might have called and tried to break it up," he finished with a laugh.

"His remark could not have been better calculated to draw a reply from Mike Brennan—a reply that gave Bob just the information he wanted but for which he hesitated to ask. For the hotel man said:

"Naw, they weren't goin' to any party! They wanted to catch the milk train to get out of town. There was something in the wind, I'm sure of that. And I'm just as glad they got out of my hotel. I keep a respectable place, I do!" growled the big, burly Irishman.

He did—when he thought it served his purpose to do so. The police, more than once, had combed Mike Brennan's place in a search for criminals, and Bob knew this.

"So they took the milk train, did they?" he asked.

"Yep! Got out of town as soon as they could —hand organ, monkey and all."

"Well, then I can't give him another job," remarked the young detective, as if this was the object which had brought him at that early morning hour to the Railroad House. "We'll have to get

a man with a harp next time we want special music," and he laughed.

"A harp is good!" chuckled Mike Brennan. "Sure, I might have a go at that meself! Good-night t' you!"

"Good-night!" echoed Bob, as he jumped into his flivver. "I guess he hasn't tumbled," he said to himself as he steered in the direction of the railroad station. "I may have this all to myself yet."

Bob's idea is clear to you, I suppose. The name Rodney had opened up big possibilities to him. Rodney—Rod—Rod Marbury—the suspect. And yet Mike Brennan either had not heard this name used in connection with the robbery at Storm Mountain, or he did not connect Rodney with Rod. For Rod was the name most often used by the police and in the stories circulated about the queer case.

"Rodney doesn't mean anything to him, except that his Italian guest was masquerading under a false name," thought Bob to himself. "And that's so common he isn't likely to talk about it. If I work fast I may pull this thing off myself without the police coming in on it. But I've had a lot of surprises to-night, and I don't quite see all the ends of this thing. Who was that man with the iron hook? His name was no more Dauber than mine is, though he must have used it more than once or Pietro wouldn't have recognized it—no, not Pietro

—Rodney Marbury—the man who has the brass box!"

This thought excited Bob and he stepped on the gas, sending his flivver along at a fast clip. He had had a foot gas pedal attached to his car, enabling him to drive it more easily.

"And so he isn't an Italian at all," was his further musing.

"Queer I never suspected that. Though of course this Rod may be of Italian birth—enough so as to enable him to disguise himself as a dago organ grinder and talk broken English. He did it to perfection, though. But hold on—wait a minute——"

Bob was doing some quick thinking and this had its effect on his speed, for he cut along at a lively clip. However, at this hour of the early morning the roads were practically deserted.

"If this fellow was Rodney Marbury, the shipmate of Jolly Bill and Hiram Beegle—why didn't either of them recognize him? They ought to, for they saw him often enough. They had sailed with him—they went on the treasure hunt together. And yet this supposed Italian comes to town, and passes close to Hiram and Jolly Bill, and neither of them says a word. Hiram ought to, if anybody would—for he was assaulted by this chap. And yet this Pietro didn't hang back any. He associ-

ated right with Bill and Hiram. I can't understand it unless——"

Bob ceased his musing for a moment and made a turn around a bad place in the highway. He was on a straight stretch now to the station.

"Disguised!" he exclaimed aloud, the word floating out into the cool, night air. "That's it—he was disguised as a dago, with false hair and a false beard, I'm sure! Queer I never thought of that. He had an awful thick mop of hair and enough beard for a sofa cushion. But I never tumbled. Must have been pretty well made and stuck on. Or he may have let his own hair and beard grow —that would be the best disguise ever! Say, I've missed a lot of tricks in this—I've got to get busy and redeem myself. But I'm on some sort of a track now, and that's better than chasing off through the bushes as I've been doing.

"Speaking of bushes—I wonder if this Rod—or Pietro—really was planting monkey nuts in that bramble patch or—or—jimminity crickets!" fairly shouted Bob in his excitement—"I have it now! He was digging after the treasure! Of course! That's it. He had the map from the brass box and he was searching over Hank's land for the treasure. Why didn't I think of that before? Digging holes to plant monkey nuts! I might have known nothing of that sort could have been done. He was

on the search for the treasure, of course. Oh, if I can only catch him!"

But as Bob neared the station another thought came to him.

"If he had the map, which told exactly where the treasure was buried, why did he have to dig all over the bramble patch on a chance of finding it? A man who buries treasure, and makes a map of it, gives the exact location so he can find it again, or so he can direct those whom he wants to find it.

"Now Hank buried the treasure and he made a map of it so Hiram, coming after him, could find it. Hiram isn't any too well educated so the map would have to be fairly simple. Any one could read it.

"Then this Rodney could follow the directions, and if he had the map he could have gone at once to the right spot and dug up the treasure. Instead he digs holes all over the bramble patch. What's the answer?

"He didn't have the map—of course. Or, if he did, he didn't know how to read it. The answer is that he didn't have it and was making a blind hunt.

"Then, if he didn't have the map who has it? Who is the other party most interested?"

There was but one answer to this. New suspicions were fast forming in the mind of Bob Dexter—new suspicions which might mean the solving of the Storm Mountain mystery.

CHAPTER XXI

NEW TACTICS

WITH a grinding and squeaking of the brakes, which was a reminder to Bob that he must get some new lining, the little car came to a stop near the silent and deserted railroad station in Cliffside. Deserted it was save for the presence of the lone agent in the ticket office, as evidenced by a gleam of light shining out into the cold and clammy mists of the night.

The milk train had just left, Bob knew. If he had hoped to intercept either the man with the hook or the man with the monkey he was disappointed, but Bob did not show any signs of this.

"Hello, Mr. Dawson," he greeted the agent, who peered wonderingly out at him through the brass bars of his window.

"Well, bless my ticket stamp—if it isn't Bob Dexter!" exclaimed the agent. "What in the world are you doing here at this hour? The milk train's gone, Bob!"

"I know it. Heard her pulling up Storm Mountain."

"And there isn't another until the accommodation at 5:15."

"Which I'm not going to take, thank goodness."

"Well, then—" there was mild questioning in the agent's voice.

"It's just a private matter I'm working on, Mr. Dawson," said Bob, making sure no early morning travelers were sitting on the deserted benches in the dimly-lighted waiting room of the station.

"Oh, up to your old tricks, eh, Bob?" The agent knew the reputation the lad was earning for himself.

"Something like that—yes."

"Another Jennie Thorp case, Bob?"

"Not exactly. But tell me, Mr. Dawson, did a couple of men get on the milk train just now?"

"Yes—two men—one with an iron hook in place of a hand."

"Those are the ones. The other was a fellow with a big bunch of whiskers and hair enough to stuff a sofa pillow, and a hand organ and a monkey."

"No, Bob, not exactly."

"Not exactly—what do you mean, Mr. Dawson?"

"I mean there wasn't any man with a hand organ and a monkey."

"Oh, well, he could have left that behind, though what the poor monk will do I don't know. Anyhow he had a lot of hair and whiskers, didn't he?"

"No, Bob," answered the agent, "he didn't. You got that one man right—he had a hook all right.

But the other was smooth shaved and his hair wasn't any longer than mine."

Bob was staggered for a minute. Then a light broke in on him.

"Of course!" he cried. "He could have taken off the false beard and wig, or have stopped long enough, somewhere, to get a hair cut and a shave."

"He had a shave, Bob, I'll testify to that. I was close to him when he bought the tickets."

"Bought tickets, did he? Where to, Mr. Dawson?"

"Perry Junction."

"Um, down where they can catch the fast trains. But there aren't so many trains at this time of the morning. Maybe I can nab them yet."

"What are you going to do, Bob?" asked Mr. Dawson, as the lad started from the station.

"I'm going to take the short cut to Perry Junction. I can beat the milk, for it's got half a dozen stops between here and there to pick up cans. I want to see these fellows."

"Better not take any chances with them, Bob," advised Mr. Dawson. "They didn't look like very nice customers, especially that man with the iron hook. If he made a dig at you with that—zowie, boy!" The agent drew in his breath sharply.

"Don't worry—I'm not going to take any chances, Mr. Dawson. I'm going to stop and pick up an officer at headquarters."

"I think that's wise. I didn't like the looks of these chaps from the time they came in. I was suspicious of them, and I thought I might be in for a hold-up, until I remembered that I didn't have enough money on hand to make it worth while. But they were civil enough."

"And you say the man with the smooth face bought the tickets?"

"Yes—two, for Perry Junction."

"Did he talk like an Italian?"

"No, Bob, I can't say he did. Talked like an American, as far as I could judge."

"Then he must have dropped his pretended Italian jargon along with his hair and whiskers," thought the young detective. "Well, things are beginning to work out—though what the end will be I can't tell." Aloud, to the agent, he said:

"Well, I guess I'll be getting along if I'm going to beat the milk, though that won't be so hard. She's got a bad grade ahead of her up Storm Mountain. Much obliged for your information, Mr. Dawson."

"Don't mention it, Bob. Hope you make out all right with your case."

"Thanks, I hope I do."

"I reckon, before long, you'll be on the police force of some big city, Bob."

"No such luck as that, Mr. Dawson. But that's what I'm working for. Good-night."

"Good-morning, you mean!" chuckled Mr. Dawson as he smiled at the lad. "It'll soon be daylight."

"So it will. Well, I've got to get a hustle on."

The young detective found Constable Tarton on night duty at police headquarters. Mr. Tarton had considerable respect for Bob, for he knew of the outcome of the case of the Golden Eagle. In fact Caleb would rather work with Bob than with Chief Miles Duncan.

So it was with eagerness that Mr. Tarton agreed to accompany the lad in the flivver to Perry Junction, there, if need arose, to make an arrest on suspicion.

"I'll just wake up Sim Nettlebury, and let him take charge of matters," the constable said with a chuckle. "Not that anything is likely to happen in Cliffside at this hour of the morning, but I got to follow regulations. Sim won't like it, though, being woke up."

Sim didn't, as was evident from his grumbles and growls as the night constable aroused him in the room over the main office of police headquarters. A certain proportion of the limited police force of Cliffside slept on the premises, taking turns the different nights.

"Now I'm ready to go with you, Bob," announced Mr. Tarton, as the half-awake Sim, rubbing his

eyes, tried to find a comfortable place behind the desk with its green-shaded lamp.

Bob Dexter had thought out his plan carefully, and yet he was not at all sure of the outcome. The identity of Rod Marbury, the man suspected of assaulting Hiram and stealing the brass-bound box, with Pietro Margolis was a surprise to the young detective. How the man with the iron hook fitted into the mystery Bob could not yet fathom.

But that something had occurred between the two to make Rod leave off his disguise, and hurry out of town was evident.

"He fooled Hiram and he fooled Jolly Bill," thought Bob. "The question is now can he fool me. I was taken in by his monkey nuts, but from now on I'll be on my guard. And yet I don't believe he took the brass box. But he may know who did. The man with the iron hook couldn't have—I'm sure. Hiram never mentioned such a character, and he would have done so, I'm sure, if there had been any such character to mention. You don't meet a man with an iron hook every day. Well, it may be working out—this Storm Mountain mystery—but it's doing so in a queer way."

"All set, Bob," said the constable, as he got in the flivver.

"Let's go!" was the grim rejoinder.

The roads were clear of traffic, save for an occasional farmer bringing to town, for the early

market, a load of produce. And, as Bob had said, he could take a short cut, intercepting the milk train, almost before it reached Perry Junction. The train, as the lad had stated, would have to make a number of stops to pick up cans of milk which the dairymen had left at the different stations along the route.

"Those fellows must have been in a desperate hurry, Bob, to take the milk train," said the constable, as they jolted along side by side in the flivver.

"Hurry—on the milk?" laughed Bob.

"Well, I mean in a hurry to get out of town. Of course the train is a slow-poke, but they could get out of Cliffside on her, and that's what they wanted, maybe."

"That's so," agreed Bob. "I didn't think of that."

"Think of what?"asked Caleb Tarton.

"Oh—nothing much. Hold fast now, here's a bit of rough road."

It was rough—so much so that at the speed which Bob drove all the constable could do was to hold on. And he didn't dare open his mouth to ask questions for fear of biting off his tongue.

Which, perhaps, was Bob's object. I'm not saying it was, but it would have been a good way to insure silence.

Then they got onto a smooth, concrete highway,

leading directly to Perry Junction. A faint light was showing, now, in the east.

"Soon be sun-up, Bob," remarked Mr. Tarton.

"Yep. It's been a long night, I'll say. I haven't been to bed yet."

"You haven't?"

"No. I ran off a party. Then I ran onto this clew and I've been busy on it ever since."

"Well, we'll soon know what's what, Bob. There's the station right ahead of us."

"Yes, and here comes the milk," added Bob, as a shrill whistle cut the keen, morning air.

"We're just about in time," remarked the constable.

Perry Junction was not a station of any importance save that certain fast trains stopped there to pick up passengers from other points along the line. And it was evidently the object of the two men to take advantage of this. Bob had made his plans well, and they would have worked out admirably save for one thing.

The two men he was after weren't on the train. A simple thing, but it loomed big.

Bob and the constable leaped from their flivver as the milk train drew to a screeching stop, and the two hid themselves behind a corner of the station. It was now light enough so that they could see who got off the milk train. But the man with the iron hook and the man who had been masquerad-

ing as an organ grinder, were not among the passengers that alighted.

"Looks like they give us the slip, Bob," observed Mr. Tarton.

"Yes, it does. But they may be on there yet. This isn't the end of the milk run. I'll ask the conductor."

The latter was walking up and down the platform waiting for the completion of loading on more rattling cans of milk. He knew Bob, and greeted him.

"Man with an iron hook?" questioned the ticket puncher. "Yes, he got on at Cliffside."

"Was there another man with him—a smooth-shaved man?"

"Yes, Bob, there was. I didn't have many passengers—we seldom do this time of year, with the excursion business over. But I remember those two."

"They had tickets for Perry Junction, didn't they?"

"Yes, now I recall it, they did."

"But they aren't here."

"No, Bob, they got off somewhere between Tottenville and Andover. I noticed them at Tottenville, but I didn't see them at Andover."

"But there isn't a station between those two places."

"No station, Bob, but we stop at three white posts to pick up milk. Farm-stations we call them

—not regular stops for any except my train. These fellows could have gotten off anywhere along there, and they probably did."

"Shucks!" ejaculated Bob. "That's it! I might have known they wouldn't give themselves away by coming to the place for which they have tickets. They got off at some place where they wouldn't be noticed. Well, I guess we might as well go back," he told the constable.

"How about searching the train?" asked the latter eagerly. "They might be concealed somewhere on board, Bob."

"No, I don't think so," said the conductor. "They just dropped off at one of the white post stops between Tottenville and Andover. Why, was there anything wrong about them?"

"Suspicions, mostly, that's all," said Bob.

The last can rattled aboard, the conductor gave the signal, the engineer gave two toots to the whistle and the milk train pulled away from Perry Junction.

"Guess they had you barkin' up the wrong tree, didn't they, Bob?" asked the constable as they rode on back to Cliffside.

"In a way, yes. But, after all, maybe it's just as well it turned out like this."

"Just as well, Bob? Why, don't you want to help find the rascal that robbed Hiram?"

"Yes, but I don't believe either of these fellows did."

"Who did then?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

It was with this end in view that, two days later, Bob paid a visit to the Mansion House where Jolly Bill Hickey was still staying. Bob had a long talk with Nelson Beel, the proprietor.

"Certainly, Bob, I'll let you do it," was the permission given. "But I don't like any disturbance about my place."

"There won't be any, Mr. Beel, I promise you that. It will all be done very quietly."

"All right, Bob, go to it."

Thereupon the young detective began some new tactics.

CHAPTER XXII

THE BRASS BOX

NEARLY every town, or small city has, or had at one time, a large hotel known as the "Mansion House." In this Cliffside was no exception, and the chief hostelry bore that name. It was a big, rambling, old-fashioned structure and, in its day, had housed many a "gay and festive scene," to quote the Cliffside *Weekly Banner* which once ran a series of stories about famous men and places in the community.

However, though the Mansion House may once have had such a distinction as being a place (one of several thousand) where George Washington stayed overnight, now were its glories departed, and it was but an ordinary hotel. Some old residents, who had given up their homes, lived there the year around. It was the stopping place of such traveling men, or drummers, who occasionally came to the place, and the annual "assembly ball" was held there.

Being an old-fashioned hotel it had many connecting and adjoining rooms, with doors between, and transoms of glass over the said doors. It was a

"family" hotel, to use the expression Mr. Beel often applied to his place.

Consequently it wasn't difficult for Bob Dexter to secure a place of observation near the room where Jolly Bill Hickey had elected to stay for a time.

"I don't know how long I'll be here," Bill had said to Mr. Beel, when Bob drove him to the place the morning of the discovery of the crime on Storm Mountain.

"Stay as long as you like—we'll try and make you welcome!" Mr. Beel had said with the bluff heartiness that characterized him when greeting a new guest.

"And you're sure no one will object to my wooden leg?" asked Jolly Bill.

"Huh! I'd like to see 'em!" snapped out the proprietor. "You got just as good a right to have a wooden leg as another man has to have two of flesh and blood, I reckon."

"Thanks. I'll do my best not to make any trouble."

So had Jolly Bill taken up his residence, and his reference to having a "few shots left in the locker" to pay his way was amply borne out, for he met his weekly bills with great regularity.

"There's a little cubbyhole of a room next to his," Mr. Beel had said when Bob broached his new tactics. "It used to be used to store drummers' trunks in, when Cliffside did a bigger business than

it does now. You can get in there and look over the transom if you like."

"Well, I'll try it. Maybe it will be a longer session than I anticipate. But don't let it be known that I'm there."

"I won't, Bob. You can slip in any time you like. I'll furnish you with a key. And you'll have a good excuse in being here."

"Yes—arranging for the annual banquet of the Boys' Club."

For there was such a function, and it was always held at the Mansion House, the club house not being large enough. Bob had gone to the trouble of getting himself appointed a member of the Banquet Committee, and though it was still some weeks before that affair would take place, it gave sufficient excuse, in case he was questioned, to account for his presence in the hotel.

Thus it was arranged and Bob, deserting his friends and relatives for the time being, took up his quarters in the little cubbyhole of a room, adjoining that which harbored Jolly Bill and his wooden leg.

Just what Bob hoped to find out or prove he hardly knew in his own mind. Certainly he did not tell Ned or Harry, for he couldn't. It was all so vague—merely a suspicion.

"What's got into old Bob lately?" asked Harry of Ned, a few days after the futile chase of the milk train.

"Oh, he's working on that Storm Mountain mystery, you can depend on that."

"Has he said anything to you about it?"

"Nothing special. Bob never does when he's following close on a clew. But he said he might not see us for a few days."

"Well, I guess we'd just better let him alone."

"Sure. He won't thank us for butting in, and if he wants any help he knows we'll give it to him."

"Sure."

Thereupon the two chums had gone off nutting again, leaving Bob Dexter to his own devices.

Taking advantage of the fact that there were few late arrivals in the Mansion House, which, unlike the Railroad hotel, did not keep open all night, Bob made his entry as an unregistered guest in his little room about two o'clock one morning. Mr. Beel was the only one around at the time.

"Good luck to you, Bob," the proprietor had said, as he watched the lad enter his room quietly. "He's in there," and he motioned to the apartment of Jolly Bill and his wooden leg.

Bob's first activity, after settling himself, was to mount on a chair and examine, as best he could in the feeble light of one electric bulb in his room, the transom over the door between his apartment and that of Jolly Bill.

At one time these two rooms had formed part of a suite, but when there was little call except for

single rooms, the transom had been closed and painted black to prevent surreptitious views from one room to the other.

"And the paint's on my side," exclaimed Bob. "That makes it easier. I'll scrape a peep-hole in the morning, after Jolly Bill goes out."

Bob was concentrating his efforts and suspicions on this wooden-legged sailor now, since all efforts to trace the man with the iron hook, and his companion, had failed.

Bob did not sleep very well the remainder of that night. His mind was too filled with the possibilities that might follow his action. But toward morning he fell asleep, and the early winter sun was quite high when he opened his eyes.

"Gosh," he exclaimed in a whisper. "I ought to have been up long ago. Wonder if he's gone out?"

He listened but could hear no sound from the next room.

"I wish I hadn't gone to sleep," mused Bob, rather chagrined at himself. "Maybe he's flown the coop and gone out on the milk train."

But he was reassured, a little later, by hearing the voice of Jolly Bill himself. The voice followed a knock on his door—evidently a summons to arise —for there were no room telephones in the Mansion House. A chambermaid or bell boy had to come up and knock on the doors of guests to arouse them in case they requested such attention.

"All right! All right!" sounded the voice of the man with the wooden leg. "All right! I'm getting up! Got lots to do to-day!"

This was rather amusing, from the fact that since he had arrived in Cliffside Jolly Bill had done nothing in the line of work—unless digging worms to go fishing could be so called.

"All right! I'm on the job, too!" said Bob, silently to himself. Quickly he mounted to a chair which raised him so that he could look through the transom over his door. He moved silently. He did not want Bill to know, if it could be avoided, that there was a guest in the next room.

With the point of a knife blade, Bob removed a little of the black paint on his side of the transom. It gave him a peep-hole and he applied his eye to it.

Rather a mean and sneaking business, this of spying through peep-holes, the lad thought. The only consolation was that he was going through it in a good cause—his desire to bring criminals to justice and aid Hiram Beegle.

To Bob's delight he found that he had a good view of the interior of Jolly Bill's room, and he had sight of that individual himself, sitting on the edge of his bed and vigorously stretching himself as a preliminary to his morning ablutions.

Bill's wooden leg was unstrapped from the stump, and lay on a chair near him, as did the heavy cane

he used to balance himself, for he was a stout man.

"It couldn't be better—if it works out the way I think it will," mused the lad. Eagerly and anxiously he watched now for the next move on the part of the old sailor. For it was on this move that much might depend.

Having stretched himself, and rubbed his eyes to remove therefrom as much as possible of the "sleep," by a process of dry washing, Jolly Bill prepared for his day's activities by reaching out for his wooden leg.

"Now," whispered Bob to himself, as he stood gazing through his peep-hole in the painted transom, "am I right or am I wrong? It won't take long to tell if things work out the way I expect they will. Steady now!" he told himself.

Jolly Bill pulled his wooden leg toward him as he sat on the bed. He must strap it on before he could begin stumping about to begin his day of "work," whatever that mysterious occupation was.

And then, as Bob watched, the old sailor, with a look toward the window, to make sure the shades were pulled down, plunged his hand into the interior of his wooden leg.

This artificial limb, like many of its kind, was hollow to make it lighter. There was quite a cavity within.

Another look toward the curtained window, but never a glance did Jolly Bill bestow on the painted

transom over the door between his room and the cubby-hole. Why should he look there? No one had occupied it since he had been in the Mansion House. And it was unoccupied when Bill went to bed last night. He had made sure of that as he always did. But Bob had come in since.

And then, as the young detective peered through his peep-hole, he saw a sight which thrilled him.

For, from the hollow interior of his wooden leg, Jolly Bill pulled out the brass-bound box that had been so mysteriously stolen from the strong room of Hiram Beegle—the strong room which was locked in such a queer way, with the key inside and the criminal outside.

Jolly Bill held up the brass box, and smiled as he observed it.

"I guess," he murmured, "I guess it's about time I had another go at you, to see if I can get at what you mean. For blessed if I've been able to make head or tail of you yet! Not head or tail!"

And, sitting on the bed, his wooden leg beside him, Jolly Bill Hickey began fumbling with the brass box.

The eyes of Bob Dexter shone eagerly.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOLVING A PUZZLE

MANY a detective, amateur or professional, having seen what Bob Dexter saw through the scratched hole in the painted transom, would have rushed in and demanded the box which held the secret of the buried treasure. But Bob knew that his case was only half completed when he discovered who had the box.

Up to within a few days ago he had suspected the mysterious and missing Rod Marbury. But with the linking up of that character with the organ grinder, and the departure of the latter with the hook-armed man, Bob had to cast some new theories.

Now he had succeeded beyond his wildest hopes, but still he was not ready to spring the trap. There were many things yet to be established.

True, there was the brass box, and as Bill, with his wooden leg not yet strapped to his stump sat looking at it on the edge of his bed, Bob could not but believe that it was the treasure box willed to Hiram Beegle, and stolen from that old sailor.

The half-whispered, exulting words of Jolly Bill himself as he eagerly eyed the box proved it to be the one sought. But Bill's words also indicated

that there was still some mystery connected with the casket—some secret about it that needed solving.

For the wooden-legged man had said:

"I've not been able to make head or tail of you —not head or tail!"

That indicated a failure to ascertain the hiding place of the gold buried by Hank Denby.

"But Bill's had a try for it," mused Bob as he watched the man. "That digging of fish worms was only a bluff. He was digging to see if the treasure might not be buried on Hiram's place.

"And that story of monkey nuts—that was bluff, too. The Italian, or whatever Rod is, was digging for the treasure. But he didn't have whatever is in the box to guide him. Now I wonder what's in that box?"

Bob did not have to wait long in wonder, for the wooden-legged man, after fumbling with what seemed to be a complicated lock or catch, opened the brass-bound box, and took out a folded paper. That was all there was in the box it seemed, bearing out Hiram's story to the effect that Hank had left him directions for finding the treasure—a most peculiar proceeding. But then the whole story of digging up the treasure on the South Sea island was peculiar—like a dream, Bob thought. Sometimes he found himself doubting the whole yarn.

But there was a paper in the brass box, that was certain, and Jolly Bill had gone to considerable

trouble, not to say risk, in securing it. He had played his cards well, not to have been suspected by Hiram, Bob thought.

"But if Bill, smart as he is, can't make head or tail of that paper, which tells where the treasure is buried, how can Hiram do so?" mused Bob. "He hasn't as much education as Bill has. They were all common sailors, though Hank may have been the best educated—he probably was. But he would know Hiram couldn't solve any complicated directions for digging up buried treasure, so he would have to leave him simple rules to follow.

"Now if Bill can't make head or tail of it, how could Hiram be expected to?" That was bothering Bob now more than he liked to admit. But he was far from giving up the quest. He must watch Bill.

The one-legged sailor, unconscious that he was being observed in his "undress uniform," was eagerly looking over the paper. He held it rightside up, and upside down. He turned it this way and that, and held it up to the light. But all to no purpose as indicated by his slowly shaking head.

"No, I can't make head or tail of you, and that's a fact," he said with a sigh. "I'll have to get help on this. But I don't want to if I don't have to. If I could only get Hiram to talk he might give me the lead I want. I'll have another

go at Hiram, I guess. He doesn't suspect anything yet."

Bill returned the paper to the little casket, closed the lid with a snap and then put the brass box back in the interior of his wooden leg. Having done this Bill proceeded to get dressed for the day.

And Bob Dexter prepared to make so quiet an exit from the Mansion House that the old sailor would not know he had been there. To this end Bob left before Bill was downstairs, slipping out the back way as arranged with Mr. Beel.

In first planning his work looking to the discovery of the thief who had taken Hiram's box, Bob Dexter had in mind a very spectacular bit of play. It was based on some of the stories of celebrated detectives—real or imagined sleuths.

How Bob had come, by a process of elimination, to suspect that Jolly Bill was the thief, I think you can reason out for yourselves. If not I shall disclose it to you. Sufficient now to say that Bob did suspect Jolly Bill, and with good reason, though there was one big gap in the sequence of steps leading to the crime. And that was to learn how the key had been put back in the room where the unconscious Hiram lay. But of that more later.

As I say, Bob had in mind a daring bit of work as soon as he discovered for a fact that Bill had the box. This was nothing more or less than a false

alarm of fire at the Mansion House. Bob reasoned that if the cry of fire were to be shouted Bill, and all the other guests, would at once rush to save that which they considered most valuable. And that if Bill kept the brass box locked somewhere in his room, he would rush to get it out, Bob fully believed.

However the discovery that the sailor kept the box in what, to him, was the best hiding place in the world, namely his wooden leg, made it unnecessary for Bob to go to the length he had planned.

Bill, himself, had given away the secret. The box was always with him. It was only necessary to take off his wooden leg and the secret of the treasure would be laid bare, so to speak.

"That is I'll get the directions for finding the gold," mused Bob. "But whether I can make any sense of the directions is another matter. However, we'll have a try."

Bob's first act, after emerging from the hotel by the back way, was to go home and get a good breakfast. He was just in time to eat with his uncle who was preparing to leave for his office.

"Well, Bob, you're quite a stranger," said Mr. Dexter, smiling.

"Yes," admitted the lad. "But I'm going to be at home more, from now on."

"I do hope so," sighed his aunt. "I'm so wor-

ried about you, Bob! You aren't going to get into danger, are you?"

"No, indeed, Aunt Hannah."

"Well, I know one thing he's going to get into next week," said Uncle Joel dryly.

"What's that?" asked Bob.

"School," was the laconic reply. "School opens next week."

"I shan't be sorry," replied Bob. "I'll clean up this case and be glad to get back to my books. There's a lot of fun at school."

But there yet remained considerable work to be done on the Storm Mountain mystery and the solving of the secret of the log cabin. To this end the young detective visited Hiram Beegle in the lonely shack that morning. To the old sailor Bob told certain things, and certain things he didn't tell him. But what he said was enough to cause Hiram to sit down and write Jolly Bill a letter, a letter worded as Bob suggested.

Whether it was this letter, or because he wanted to see his old messmate is not certain, but, at any rate, Jolly Bill Hickey called at the log cabin next day. And Bob Dexter was there.

So, also, were Bob's chums, Ned and Harry. None of the lads, however, was in evidence, being in fact, concealed in the strong room—that same room which had been so mysteriously locked after the theft of the brass box.

Bob had given up, for the time being, any attempt to solve the mystery of the key. He found it better to concentrate on one thing at a time, and the principal matter was to get Hiram into possession of the treasure that was rightfully his.

"What do you want us to do, Bob?" asked Ned as, with Harry, he sat in the strong room, waiting the development of the plot.

"Well, we'll have to be guided pretty much by circumstances," Bob answered. "Jolly Bill is coming here, and Hiram is going to talk to him. Bill doesn't know we're here. At least I hope he doesn't. Perhaps you'd just better leave it to me. Follow me when I go out and back me up."

"Sure we'll do that," promised Harry.

So they waited and, in due time, Bill came stumping up the path. He had engaged a taxicab, or one of the decrepit autos in Cliffside which passed for such, and so rode up to the log cabin in style. At Bob's suggestion, Hiram had offered to pay for the taxi, in order to insure Bill's presence.

"Well, here I am, old timer! Here's your old friend Jolly Bill Hickey! Here's your old messmate!" greeted the one-legged man as he clapped Hiram heartily on the shoulder. "We must stick together, messmate. You've had hard luck and I've had hard luck. Now we'll stick together."

"He'll stick Hiram all right, if he gets the chance," whispered Ned.

"Quiet," urged Bob, who was listening at the keyhole of the strong room, the door of which was closed, but not locked.

After some general conversation, during which Bill emphasized his friendship for Hiram, the one-legged man asked:

"Haven't you any idea, Hiram, where old Hank would be likely to bury that treasure of his? If you had you could go dig it up, you know, without waiting to find the box with the map in. If you had an idea, you know, I could help you dig. I only got one leg, that's true, but I can dig. Look how I dug the fish worms."

"Yes, you did dig worms, Bill," admitted Hiram gently. "And I don't see how you did it. It must have hurt your leg—I mean the stump where your wooden leg is fastened on. Why don't you take off your wooden leg, Bill, and rest yourself. Come on, take off your wooden leg."

"What's that!" cried Bill, with more emphasis than the simple request seemed to call for. "Take off my leg? I guess not! I only take it off when I go to bed."

"Well, take it off now, and go to bed," urged Hiram. He was following a line of talk suggested by Bob, though the latter had not disclosed the reason therefor.

"What—take off my wooden leg and go to bed—

in the morning?" cried Bill. "You must be crazy, Hiram! What's gotten into you?"

"I want to see you take off that wooden leg, Bill," was the mild reply. "I'd like to see that wooden leg off you."

"Well, you aren't going to see it off me!" snapped out Jolly Bill, who was anything but that now. "I'm not going to take off my wooden leg to please any one! There's something wrong with you, Hiram. I can tell that."

His voice was suspicious. Bob looked toward his silent chums. The time to act was approaching.

"You won't take off your wooden leg, Bill?" asked Hiram.

"Not for anybody—not until I go to bed!" declared the other vigorously.

"Well, then, it's time you went to bed!" cried Bob, as he swung open the door and walked out into the main room of the log cabin, closely followed by Ned and Harry.

"Wha—what—what's the meaning of this?" cried Jolly Bill, when he could get his breath. "What—why, it's my friend Bob!" he cried, with seeming pleasure as he arose and stumped forward with extended hands. "My old friend Bob. Shake with Jolly Bill!"

"We'll shake your leg—that's all we'll shake!" cried Ned, taking his cue from what Bob had said.

"And you might as well go to bed now," added Harry.

Jolly Bill was standing near a couch, and suddenly, with a gentle push, Harry sent him backward so that he fell, full length on this improvised bed.

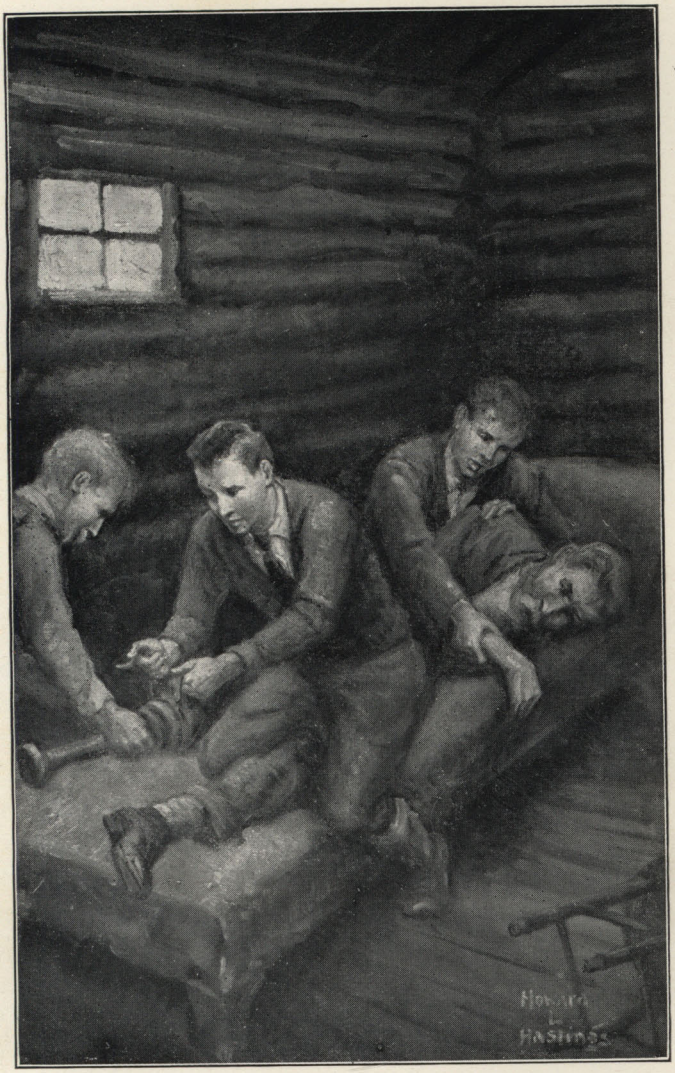
So sudden was the push, gentle as it was, that it took away the breath of Jolly Bill. He gasped and spluttered on the couch, trying in vain to raise his head, for Ned was holding him down. And as a horse cannot rise if you hold his head down, so, neither, can a man, and Bill was in just this situation.

"Let me up, you young rascals! Let me up! I'll have the law on you for this! I'll call the police! What do you mean? Hiram, what's the game? You asked me here to talk about the treasure—you said you might divide it, and now—stop! stop!" yelled Jolly Bill.

And well might he yell "stop!" for he felt many hands fumbling at his wooden leg. Hands were unbuckling the straps that held the wooden limbs to his stump. And Hiram's hands were among these.

"Stop! Stop!" angrily cried Bill. "What are you doing to me?"

"Taking off your leg—that's all," answered Bob quietly as he finally pulled the wooden member away from its owner. "But it isn't going to hurt you, Jolly Bill. This is all we want—now you may have your leg back again!"



"STOP! STOP!" ANGRILY CRIED BILL. "WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?"

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As Bob spoke he pulled from the hollow interior of the wooden limb the brass-bound box. At the sight of it Hiram raised a cry of delight.

"That's mine! That's mine!" he shouted. "It was stolen from me! It holds the secret of the buried treasure. And you had it all the while, Bill Hickey. You tried to rob me! Give me that box! Scoundrel!"

Bob, with a smile, passed it over. Nor could he cease smiling at the look of chagrin in the face of Jolly Bill Hickey. That individual seemed in a daze as he fumbled at his wooden leg and looked within the hollow of it.

"Empty! Gone!" he gasped.

"Yes, Bill, the jig is up for you," remarked Bob. "You had your try at solving the puzzle, but you couldn't make head or tail of it, could you? Not head or tail!"

At hearing repeated to him the very words he had used in reference to the brass box, Bill turned pale.

"Wha—what's it all about? Who are you, anyhow?" he gasped and there was a look of fear on his face as he gazed at Bob.

"He's just an amateur detective, that's all," chuckled Harry.

"But I guess he's solved this mystery," added Ned.

"No, not quite all," admitted Bob with a smile. "We have yet to find the treasure. Bill had a try

at it, but he couldn't locate it. Now we've got to solve the puzzle. Do you mind opening that box, Mr. Beegle? It isn't difficult. The difficulty lies inside, I think.

"And don't try any of your tricks, Bill Hickey," he sternly warned the wooden-legged sailor, who was still holding his artificial limb with a look of wonder on his face. "If things turn out all right, and Hiram doesn't want to make a complaint against you, we'll let you stump off. But if you cut up rough—we'll have the police here in no time."

"I'm not going to cut up rough," said Bill, humbly enough. "But you won't make anything out of that," he added, as Hiram drew a folded paper from the brass box. "I tried. I might as well admit it, for you seem to know all about it," he went on. "I tried but I couldn't make head or tail of it. There's no sense to it. I don't believe there is any treasure. I believe Hank used it all up himself and then left this silly paper to tease you, Hiram. It's a lot of bosh!"

And when Bob Dexter and his chums glanced at the paper they were inclined to agree with Jolly Bill, who now was far from what his name indicated.

For written in a plain, legible hand in black ink on what seemed to be a bit of old parchment, was this strange message:

It will not do to dignify, or, let us say, to magnify a sun spot. For ten million years thousands of feet have, to give them their due, tried to travel east or west, and have not found ten of these spots. The sunny south of the Red Sea makes a gateway that entices many away from their post of duty. In summer cows eat buttercups and they fatten up a lot.

"Whew!" ejaculated Ned as he read this. "What does it mean?"

"Reads like some of the stuff we have to translate in High School," added Harry.

"It's a puzzle, that's what it is," said Bob. "But we'll have to solve it. Now, Mr. Beegle——"

"Look out—there he goes!" cried the sailor, as he jumped toward the door. But he was too late to intercept Bill Hickey who, having strapped on his wooden leg, was now pegging away at top speed down the trail from Storm Mountain.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TREASURE

"LET him go," suggested Bob with a laugh. "His game's played out and he knows it. No use arresting him and having a long-drawn out case in the police court. That is if you're satisfied, Mr. Beegle?"

Hiram looked a bit disappointed at the escape of Jolly Bill. The old sailor was accustomed to seeing punishment meted out to those who deserved it. And certainly Bill deserved something in this line. But, after all, Hiram was a bit of a philosopher.

"If he isn't taking away any of my treasure with him, I don't mind letting him go," he said, as he stood in his doorway and watched Bill stumping off down the rugged trail.

"No, he won't take any of the treasure with him," said Bob. "I'll guarantee that. But whether we can find it or not is another question. Bill tried his best and didn't succeed."

"I don't see how anybody could succeed with this to work on," complained Ned as he looked at the seeming jumble of words which had been written down by Hank Denby, to guide his heir to the buried treasure, and to keep others from finding it. It

looked as if he might succeed in keeping it even from the one entitled to it. "There's no making any sense of this," concluded Ned, dubiously.

"Oh, we haven't had a real try at it yet," said Bob, cheerfully. "Let's go at it systematically. But first I'd like to clear up a few loose ends. Do you know anything about this man with the hook arm, Mr. Beegle? The one who calls himself Jake Dauber, and who went off with Rod in such a hurry?"

"No, he's a stranger to me," answered the old sailor. "He wasn't one of us in on the secret of the treasure. But he might have had some deal with Rod to help him get my share away from me. And when Rod couldn't, this man with the hook got tired and took Rod off on some other trick."

"Perhaps," admitted Bob. "But in the light of what has come out, Mr. Beegle, do you still think it was the organ grinder who attacked you on the road and tried to take the box away from you? And do you think he visited you here in the cabin, and made his way into your strong room while you were looking at this paper," and Bob indicated the cipher, for such it was.

"I don't know what to think," admitted the old sailor with a puzzled shake of his head. "I certainly didn't see any one like an organ grinder attack me on the road that day you found me, Bob. And, as I say, I didn't see the man who got in here, made me senseless and took this box."

"I think it's pretty safe to assume," said Bob, as he sat down at a table and spread the mysterious square of parchment out in front of him, "it's pretty safe to assume that Jolly Bill was the guilty man in both instances. He sneaked out on you from the bushes, Mr. Beegle, and struck you down before you had a chance to get a good look at him. You assumed that it was Rod because you had him in your mind.

"Then, finding that his first assault wasn't a success, Bill tried other tactics. He sneaked up here in the night, and saw you in the room, looking over the paper from the brass box. He made use of some mysterious chemical, I think—something that overpowered you and made you fall unconscious. He could have tossed a sponge, saturated with it, into the room while you were intent on studying this cipher, Mr. Beegle. Then, when the fumes had blown away, after having knocked you out, he entered, took the box away with him, locked you in and put the key back."

"But how did he do that?" demanded the sailor. "I can understand all but that part of the key."

"We'll come to that in time," said Bob. "I'm not worrying about that. The main mystery is solved. We know who stole the brass box, and we have it back—with the cipher, or map, if you want to call it that, which tells where the treasure is buried."

"But does it tell?" asked Ned. "It isn't exactly a map. But does it tell about the treasure?"

"Of course it does!" declared Bob.

"Then you're smarter than I give you credit for being if you can make head or tail of this," commented Harry.

"We'll see," and the young detective smiled. "At any rate we have cleaned up the loose ends. Jolly Bill was the robber, and as many another criminal has done, instead of fleeing he remained on the spot to throw suspicion off, which he succeeded in doing very well. Then came Rod on the scene, disguised as an Italian organ grinder to see if he couldn't get at the treasure after Hank Denby died. It was a good game but it didn't work."

"Rod was always up to tricks like that," said Hiram. "He would play them on board the ships we sailed in. I think he had some Italian blood in him, for once, when we were at an Italian port, he was as much at home as any of the natives, and he could talk their lingo, too. But I didn't know him in his false beard and wig. He was always smooth shaven."

"It wasn't a false beard nor wig, either," said Bob. "He just let his hair and whiskers grow. He was clean shaved when he and the man with the iron hook took the milk train. Well, we'll let them go. They don't figure in this mystery any more."

"Unless they've already dug up the treasure and skipped out with it," suggested Ned.

"It couldn't have been done," declared Bob. "Rod was only digging at random in the bramble patch, though why he hit on that is more than I can tell. But we'd better get to work on this."

"I'll say you had!" exclaimed Harry. "And there's a long trail ahead of you—a long, long trail."

However, Bob Dexter went to work with a certain system in mind. He had made a sort of study of puzzles, ciphers and the like, and knew certain fundamental rules governing them. That the secret of the treasure was a comparatively simple one he felt convinced.

"One of the things to do is to see if this paper contains any secret writing," he said. "I mean certain words may be written in with a chemical so as to remain invisible until heated or treated with other chemicals.

"Now Mr. Denby wouldn't be very likely to make a complicated affair—one that would need other chemicals to bring out the writing. He would know that Mr. Beegle, here, couldn't have such chemicals at hand. Consequently the simplest way would be the one he would select—that is heat. Let's see if, like the cipher in Poe's 'Gold Bug,' heat will bring out anything."

They held the parchment near the flame of a

candle, but aside from producing rather an unpleasant odor, nothing developed. The writing remained the same.

"The next thing," said Bob, "is to pick out from this mass of words certain ones that mean something. As it stands it might be just part of an essay on astronomy or geography. Now in ciphers of this kind certain key words are used, say beginning with the second or third from the start of the message, and then letting the words follow in a certain numerical sequence. Let's try that."

He and his chums tried—over and over again they picked out certain words, setting them down on separate sheets of paper, but all they got were meaningless, jumbled sentences.

"Perhaps it's certain letters in certain words," suggested Ned.

"Maybe," agreed Bob. "We'll try that way."

But that was of little use, either, and finally, in despair, the young detective turned to Hiram, who had done little toward helping solve the riddle, and asked:

"Did Mr. Denby ever say anything to you about how you were to proceed to search for the treasure?"

"Well," remarked Hiram slowly, "he said he'd leave me something in his will, and he left me that," and he motioned to the box.

"Yes, I know!" exclaimed Bob, impatiently. "But did he ever tell you how to use what he left you?

He knew he was going to leave the directions to you in a cipher. Now did he give you the key to it?"

"You mean this brass key?" and Hiram held up the big one that locked his strong room.

"No, I mean some sort of directions for solving this puzzle."

The old sailor arose and went to the strong chest in the corner of the strong room. He brought back an envelope.

"He gave me this letter, some years ago," he said. "It just tells me that he's going to leave me the gold as my share, being the only survivor that kept the agreement. Here's the letter."

Bob eagerly read it. As Hiram had said, it contained just that information, and nothing more. But at the end of the letter were these words:

"Don't destroy the envelope."

"Now what did he mean by that?" asked Bob, puzzled. "Is there anything else in the envelope? Let's look, Harry."

He took from his chum the envelope that had contained the letter. Looking inside Bob gave a cry of surprise and exultation.

"I've found it! I've got it!" he cried.

"What?" asked his chums.

"The key to the cipher! Look!"

With his knife Bob slit the envelope down each end. It was of thick, manila paper, and on the inside of what was the front there were marked

off in black ink a number of small oblong spaces, placed here and there irregularly.

"I don't see how that's going to help any," observed Ned.

"You don't? Just wait a minute!" cried Bob.

With his knife he cut away from the envelope the loose flap and the back, leaving an oblong piece of opaque, manila paper, marked off in those queer blank spaces. Then Bob began to cut out the spaces along the black border lines until he had a piece of paper containing fifteen oblong holes. The holes were at irregular places, and arranged in lines.

There was one space on the first line, two on the second, three on the third, five on the fourth and two each on the fifth and sixth lines.

"It's getting more complicated than ever!" sighed Harry.

"On the contrary it's getting clearer and clearer," cried Bob. "Give me the cipher," and he reached for it. "How many lines in it, Ned?"

"Just six," was the answer.

"Exactly the number of lines represented by these cut-out spaces. Now look!"

Bob placed the piece of envelope over the parchment containing the seemingly meaningless message. Only the words now showed that could be read through the cut-out openings. All the others were covered by the opaque manila. And these words stood out like a message in flame.

"Listen!" read Bob:

"Dig ten feet due east and ten south of Red gate post in buttercup lot."

For a moment no one spoke. Then Ned cried:

"The buttercup lot! That must be Mr. Denby's pasture near the bramble patch. Why, Rod was away off! He was in the wrong lot!"

"That's right!" exclaimed Bob. "I think this gives us the secret of the treasure."

They looked again at the message as revealed by the cut-out key. There was no doubt as to its meaning. Hank Denby had adopted a very simple form of cipher, yet one almost impossible to solve if one hasn't the key-paper. He had put in several points of the compass, and a number of measurements in his queer message and one might have dug for a long time without hitting on the right spot. But now it was easy.

"So that's why he didn't want me to destroy the envelope!" murmured Hiram, as he saw to what use it could be put. "Well, I'm glad I saved it all these years. Oh, he was a cute one, Hank was!"

"Do you think he planned it all this way?" asked Ned.

"He must have," asserted Bob.

"It was leaving a good deal to chance," was

Harry's opinion. "Just supposing Hiram hadn't saved that envelope?"

"In that case we'd be out of luck," Bob said. "But I think Mr. Denby must have known Hiram would save the key to the cipher. If he hadn't thought that he'd have made up some other way of letting it be known where the treasure was buried."

"Maybe it's all a joke," murmured Ned. "I mean, maybe there isn't any treasure buried after all. How'll we know?"

"Well, let's get busy!" suggested Bob. "Let's see if the story of the cipher is borne out. Let's dig for the treasure!"

"That's the idea!" cried Hiram. "Wait, I'll get some shovels. We'll go to the buttercup lot. Hank always called it that, for it's fair like a plate of butter in the summer time, with yellow flowers. But he never pastured any cows there. I wondered at him writing about cows."

"You should worry now!" joked Ned. "You'll be a rich man in a little while, if things turn out right."

Then they set out to dig up the treasure.

CHAPTER XXV

THE KEY TRICK

HANK DENBY had been a thrifty man after settling down in Cliffside following his life on the sea. Few there were who knew him well—not even his own lawyer, Judge Weston. And perhaps even fewer knew of his early association with Hiram Beegle and that the two had formed a quartette which had dug for treasure on the mystic South Sea isle.

But such was the case, strange as it may seem. The four had found the old pirate's treasure, they had made an agreement, doubtless influenced by the dominant mind of Hank Denby, and they had done just as he said.

"But you got to give him credit for being honest," declared Hiram, on their way to the buttercup lot. "Hank did just as he said he would do."

"I believe that," stated Bob. "The thing of it was that Jolly Bill and Rod didn't live up to their agreement, and, in consequence, they forfeited their rights to that share of the treasure which Hank was keeping for them. So much the more for you, Mr. Beegle."

"Yes, I hope so. But I'm going to pay you boys for your trouble," he insisted.

"Trouble? There wasn't any trouble!" laughed Ned.

"We've had a lot of fun out of it," added Harry. "But maybe, after all, there won't be any treasure."

"No treasure! What do you mean?" cried Hiram.

"Well, that fellow Rod, or whatever his name was—going off in such a hurry with that hook-armed man—they may have found out where the stuff was buried and have dug it up ahead of you. Their going off in such a hurry and secretly in the night looks bad."

"No, I don't believe so," spoke Bob. "Rod had an idea where the treasure was, I'll say that, though how he got the hint is more than I can figure out. He just must have reasoned that Hank would bury it somewhere on his own premises, and the bramble patch looked like a good place to hide gold."

"He made up a good story about it—wanting to plant monkey nuts!" laughed Harry.

"He sure did," agreed Bob. "He had me fooled for a time. And when I saw Jolly Bill digging for worms, I thought he was on the right track. Though it didn't seem reasonable to suppose that Hank would bury the stuff on Mr. Beegle's land."

Thus talking and speculating on the mystery, they reached the pasture lot spoken of as the buttercup

pasture. But the field was now sear and brown, the buttercups of summer long since having died.

They had brought with them spades and shovels, and also a tape line. This was necessary to measure off the distance from the red gate post.

"But is there a red post?" asked Harry, as they approached the lot. "I don't seem to remember one."

"There's a gate, anyhow," observed Ned, "or what's left of one. And maybe the posts were painted red, once upon a time."

This they found to be the case, though there was but a faint trace of red left on the weather-beaten wood now. But there was only one post which had any vestige of color on it, and this made their task simpler. The other post had long since rotted away.

With tape line and compass, the latter being one that Hiram Beegle always carried with him, a distance ten feet due east was measured off from the red gate post. Then the same distance was measured off due south. When this had been done, and stakes driven in at each of these points, Ned suddenly uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"Why, we're as badly off as we were before," declared Ned. "Look, we've got *two* places to dig. Which one contains the treasure?" and he indicated the south mark and the east.

"Maybe there's treasure under each one," suggested Harry.

"That's it!" cried Bob. "I was waiting for one of you to suggest that, for it occurred to me as soon as I saw that the cipher gave us two points. It's either that—treasure at both places, divided to make it less easily found, or else we've got to draw a line from the two points, making a triangle and then dig at the middle point of the longest line. But we'll try the two points first."

With beating hearts they began digging at the south point first. The ground was soft, the early frosts not yet having penetrated deeply, and as the brown soil was tossed out, shovelful after shovelful, each one was eagerly looked at.

They took turns, making an excavation large enough to stand in, and going deeper gradually. They had gone down five feet, and there was, as yet no indication of hidden wealth. Ned climbed out of the hole and dubiously shook his head.

"Looks like a hoax to me," he said.

But Bob, whose turn was next, had not taken out more than three shovelsful of earth than he uttered a cry of delight.

"I've struck something!" he shouted.

Quickly he began tossing out the soil, and, a moment later, there was revealed the rusted top of an iron box. It did not take long to uncover the chest—a veritable strong box—and haul it up on top

of the ground. The chest was closed with a heavy padlock, but it was so rusted that a few blows from a spade shattered it.

The lid was pried back, on squeaking hinges and there, revealed in the light of the sun, was, what seemed to the boys, millions of dollars in gold—old gold coins of a bygone age.

"We've found it!" shouted Harry, capering about. "We have it!"

"That's the treasure all right!" added Ned. "You're a millionaire, Mr. Beegle!"

"Not so loud!" cautioned Bob. "You don't want all Cliffside rushing out here. Go easy!"

His chums calmed down and then an examination of the gold was made. Bob's keen eyes soon estimated that there wasn't anything like a million dollars—only a few thousands at most, but it was a fortune to the old sailor.

"But we've got another hole to dig!" said Ned, somewhat disappointed at finding the gold to total less than had been hoped for. "Maybe that'll run higher."

They soon uncovered a second iron chest, which contained about the same amount of old gold, and some ornaments which, Bob said, might be sold for a large sum as antiques. So, take it all in all, it was a very tidy little fortune that was dug up that day.

While Bob and Harry remained on guard, Ned

and Hiram went to the village to get a horse and wagon to haul the stuff to the local bank. For Hiram did not share Hank's distrust of these institutions and declared that he wasn't going to run any more chances.

That there was a sensation in Cliffside, when it became known that the long-buried pirate treasure had been dug up, and that Bob Dexter had been instrumental in locating it, you can well believe.

"That boy's got stuff in him! I always said it!" declared Chief Duncan who was not at all peeved because he had not solved the mystery. "Mark my words, the police of the big cities will yet hear of Bob Dexter."

"But he can't tell how that key got back in the locked room," sneered Caleb Tarton, who was a little miffed that he had had no part in unraveling the tangle of the case.

"Maybe he will," said the chief. "Give him time. They only just got the treasure."

And when the gold had been safely put in the bank vaults, after Judge Weston had confirmed Hiram's right to it, Bob and his chums paid another visit to the log cabin. They found Chief Drayton there talking to the old sailor.

"I could 'a' figgered all this out if they'd give me time," declared Mr. Drayton. "Gosh, but when I got to act as postmaster, pound keeper and be my own constable I ain't got any too much time t' be

chief of police! I'm goin' t' talk t' th' selectmen 'bout it at next meetin'. I want a helper, that's what I want."

"Yes, you need one!" chuckled Hiram.

"But, anyhow, I know one thing!" declared Mr. Drayton. "You locked that door yourself, Hiram. That key was never put back in from the outside."

"Oh, yes, it was," said Bob, quietly.

"It was? How?" cried Ned and Harry.

"It couldn't be!" insisted Chief Drayton. "Chuckin' it down the chimbley wouldn't do it."

"Not exactly *chucking* it," said Bob, still quietly. "But the chimney was used. I'll show you how it was done. Mr. Beegle, do you mind going in your strong room, and lying on the floor just in the position you were in when you recovered consciousness after you were robbed?"

"Sure I'll do that," agreed Hiram.

The others watched him take his place. Then they went outside on Bob's request and watched him solve the key trick. The lad climbed up in the tree that grew beside the log cabin, and in a minute he was on the roof, beside the chimney.

"I'm dropping down the flue a piece of fish line with a piece of lead on the end to carry it," he said, suiting the action to the word. "Now go inside again."

They entered the room, where Hiram was lying on the floor, waiting for what was to happen next.

Dangling in the fireplace was the weighted string.

The fish line extended up the chimney flue, coming out at the top, where Bob fastened it temporarily.

The young detective then removed the lead weight and pulled the slack of the cord across the floor, until the end was close to the hand of Mr. Beegle as the sailor lay on the floor. With a small nail, passed through a knot he tied in the end of the cord, Bob fastened the line lightly to the floor.

"We now have," he said, "a cord extending from this point up through the flue and out of the chimney at the top. Now if you will all remain here you'll see the conclusion of the experiment."

They waited expectantly while Bob went outside. Presently they heard him up on the roof.

"Watch now!" he called down the flue.

A moment later there was a tinkling, metallic sound and sliding down the string came the big brass key of the strong room. It was guided down the chimney, and out from the fireplace, the ashes of which it cleared, across the room, until it fell on the floor, close to Mr. Beegle's hand. There was a twitching of the cord that was fast to the little nail driven lightly into the floor. Out came the nail on the string. The cord was pulled up out of the chimney, leaving the key on the floor beside Mr. Beegle.

"Gosh!" gasped Ned.

"Easy as pie!" murmured Harry. "When you know how it's done."

"That was how the key trick was worked," said Bob, as he joined his friends. "I got the idea after I'd seen that fellow in the circus movie slide down the inclined wire," he added. "And I also saw a little hole in the floor near where Hiram lay the night he was made unconscious. It was a hole left by the nail Bill drove in for his string.

"If a man could slide down a wire, I said to myself," a key could be made to slide the same way. I tried it with a string, passing it through the hole in the hand-end of the key, and it worked fine.

"This is what Jolly Bill did. He sneaked up, used his gas bomb, or whatever it was that overpowered Mr. Beegle, slipped in the open door of the strong room, and took the brass box. Then, to make the robbery seem mysterious, he came out and locked the door. To get the key inside he climbed the tree and slid the key down the cord he had previously prepared. Twitching out the cord and nail left not a trace except the tiny hole in the floor, of how the key got inside the locked room without an opening. The chimney flue did the trick. Though when we tried dropping the key down, finding that it only stayed in the ashes, I was puzzled for a time."

"But could Jolly Bill climb up in a tree with his wooden leg?" asked Harry.

"Oh, he was pretty nimble—I watched him use a spade," said Bob.

"And was there an elephant here?" Ned wanted to know.

"No, that, too, was Jolly Bill," said the young detective. "He bound pieces of burlap bags on his good foot and on his wooden leg—making a wad on the latter to expand it, and so he walked around, not making any shoe prints. We thought it was sacks of potatoes set down, but it was Bill's trick."

"He was full of tricks," said Ned.

"But Bob went him one better each time!" laughed Harry.

"He sure did!" murmured Hiram. "And I'm mighty thankful to you boys for what you've done. I'm going to pay you—I'm well off now."

However, the boys would not listen to this. Though later, when Hiram insisted on making a contribution to the Athletic Club, his offer was accepted and he was made an honorary member.

"Well, I guess this is the end of the Storm Mountain mystery," remarked Ned, as with Bob and some other chums, they were talking over the matter one day.

"Yes, the secret of the log cabin—how the key got in the locked room—has been solved," added Harry.

"Did the police get any trace of those two that ran away in the night—the hook-armed man and the fellow with the monkey?" asked Fred Merton.

"No, I guess they didn't," Bob answered. "There really wasn't much use chasing after them, or Jolly Bill, either. Mr. Beegle has the money and that's all he wants."

And that, really, was all that remained of the celebrated mystery. As summed up by Bob it ran this way:

"Jolly Bill and Rod, who were roaming around the country, living as best they could on what they first got out of the buried treasure, learned, at the same time, of Hank's death through letters he had caused to be sent them. They also knew Hiram had succeeded to the fortune.

"They came on to Cliffside, separately, but with the same end in view, that of robbing Hiram. Rod adopted a disguise he had used before, it seems. Jolly Bill depended on sneaking tactics, and it was he who got ahead of Rod. Of course Rod must have known Bill, for the latter did not disguise himself. But it is doubtful if Bill knew Rod under all that hair and whiskers.

"Bill succeeded in his robbery after the second attempt, but, instead of fleeing he remained on the scene and tried, by pretending friendship with Hiram, to throw suspicion from himself. Rod, knowing he had been forestalled, hung around trying to find some way of coming at the treasure. He even dug for it. But after Bill had the map, or, rather, the cipher, he couldn't do anything without the key,

which Hiram had but didn't know it. As for the hook-armed man, there must have been some secret between him and Rod which we don't know anything about. It may have had nothing to do with this case."

"But I suppose you want another case to work on, don't you, Bob?" asked Ned.

"Oh, I wouldn't mind," was the answer.

"If you could have your choice, what sort of a case would you want to work on, Bob?" asked Harry.

"A case of soda water!" exclaimed Ned.

"No, cut it out! I'm serious," went on Harry. "I'd just like to see what Bob's ideas are on the matter."

"I don't know that I have any," said Bob with a laugh. "In this detective business you can't pick and choose. At least I've never heard of any of them doing it. Of course one man may be better working on bank robberies and another on murder cases."

"A good murder case would be all to the cheese!" exclaimed Harry, but he was not quite as brutal as it looks in print.

"I don't know that I'd care for a murder case," mused Bob. "But I guess, if I ever really get into the game, I'll have to take everything that comes along."

"Get into the game? What do you mean?" cried

Ned. "Aren't you in the game for fair, now? Look how you solved the golden eagle mystery. Then we went to Beacon Beach and you cleaned up there. And now you found Hiram's treasure."

"And it was nearly a murder case at that!" remarked Bob in a low voice. "If the blow had been a little harder, Hiram would have passed out. But what's the use speculating on what will happen next? If another case comes my way I'll tackle it."

And the young detective soon had another case, as you may read of in the next volume of this series to be called "Bob Dexter and the Silver Lake Mystery, or the Dweller of the Black Cavern."

"But now I'm going to get ready to go back to school," said Bob. "And if we're going to have a football team it's time we got in some practice. Come on, fellows!"

And with whoops of joy they followed their leader.

THE END

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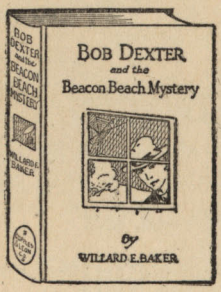

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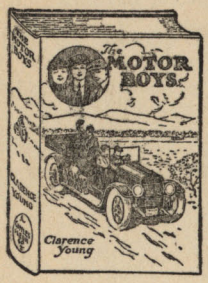

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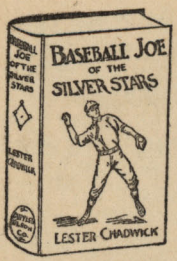

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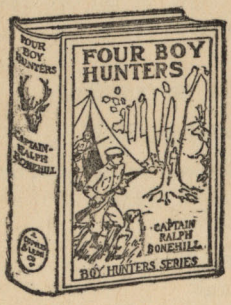

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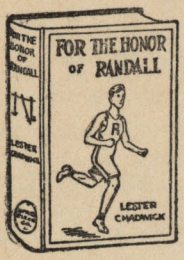

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